MARVEL SPOTLIGHT

DARK REIGN

70 YEARS OF MARVEL COMICS

MEET THE NEW BOSS

NOT *QUITE* THE SAME AS THE OLD BOSS!

Brian Michael Bendis Takes Us Behind Norman Osborn's Dark Reign

RATED T+

DIRECT EDITION

7 59606 05845 7 03711

$3.99 US

WWW.MARVEL.COM

PLUGGING INT

The Secret Invasion is over. And now that the national nightmare of the Skrull menace is over and a weary nation begins to pick up the pieces, they turn to someone with the guts and know-how to make sure this never happens again. And when that person is Norman Osborn? Welcome to the age of the Dark Reign!

I: Embrace Change, Part Two: The Spotlight Interview With Brian Michael Bendis

The second half of a two-part interview with *Secret Invasion/Dark Reign*'s Brian Michael Bendis (for the first half, check out *Marvel Spotlight: Secret Invasion Aftermath*). Brian covers his plans for Dark Reign, the Dark Avengers and introduces us to the Cabal!

II: New Avengers: A New Reign

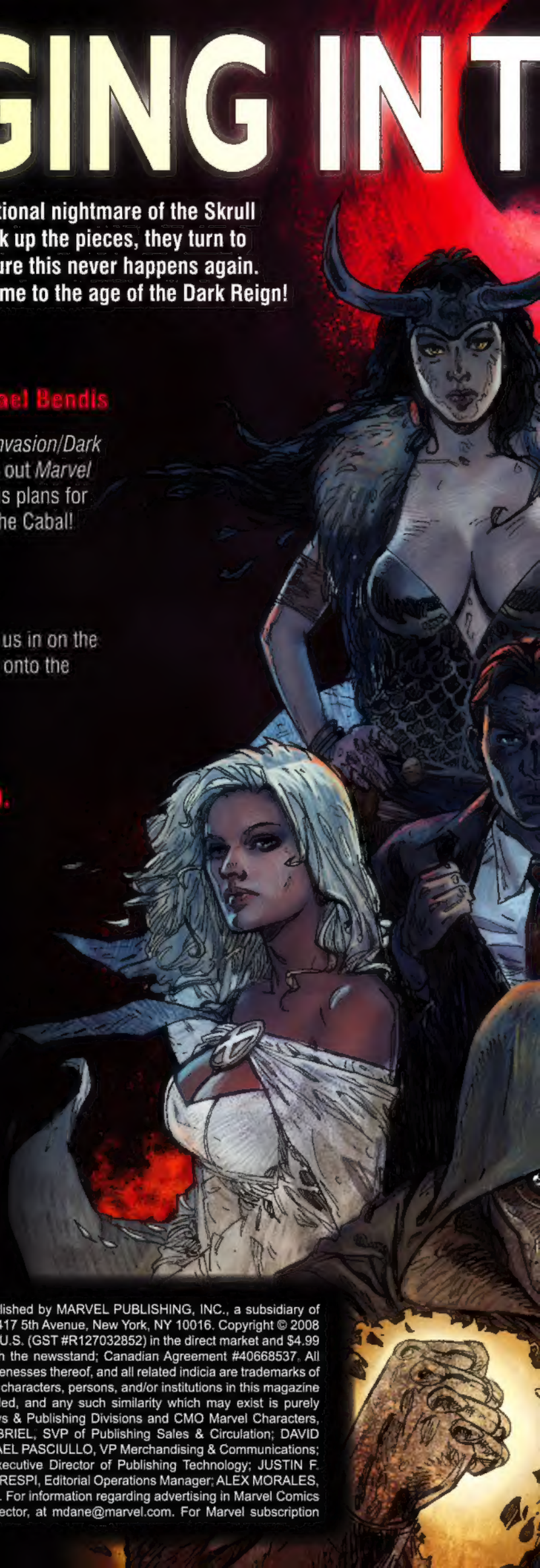
The roster of the New Avengers changes! Bendis lets us in on the new lineup changes that usher Captain America back onto the roster of Earth's Mightiest Heroes!

III: Spider-Woman: From S.H.I.E.L.D. to SKRULL to S.W.O.R.D.

Jessica Drew returns to a world that might not want her back! After being impersonated by the universe's most cunning Skrull, she's got a mountain to climb to regain trust. *Spotlight* examines Jessica Drew's past in comics and her future in the new title by Bendis and Alex Maleev!

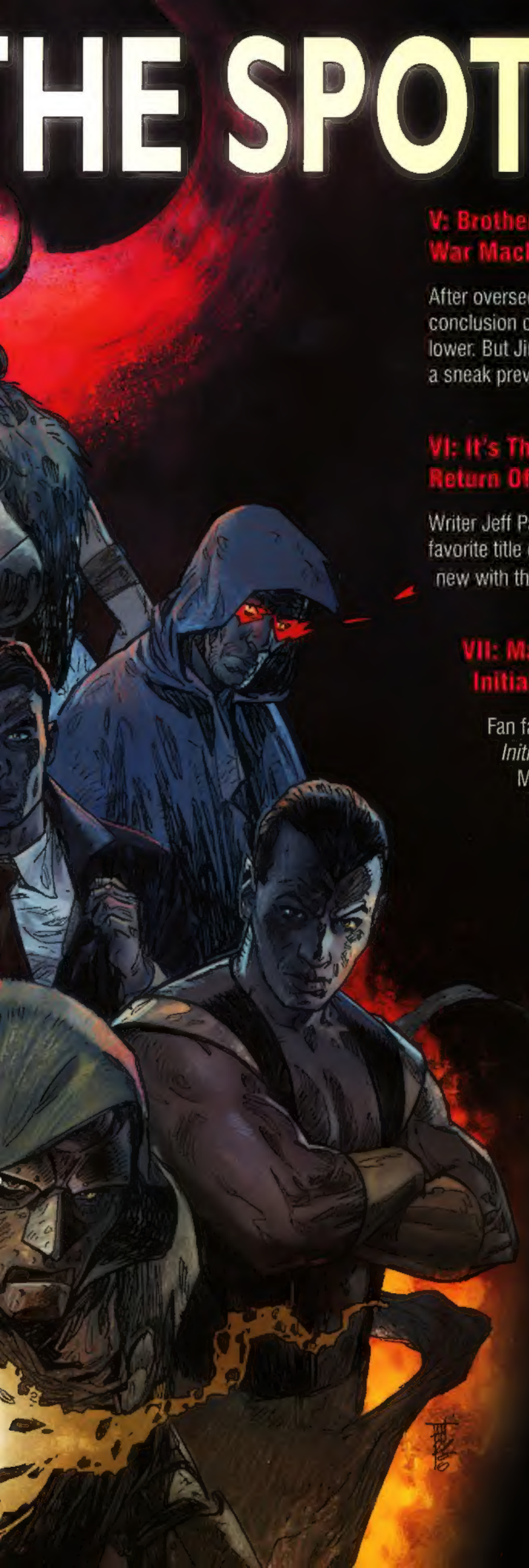
IV: Nick Fury: In From The Cold

Marvel's super-spy emerges from hibernation to lead the Secret Warriors on Nick-Fury-style missions of espionage and action. We check in with co-writers Brian Michael Bendis and Jonathan Hickman to see what's in store!



MARVEL SPOTLIGHT: DARK REIGN. First printing 2009. Published by MARVEL PUBLISHING, INC., a subsidiary of MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT, INC. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 417 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10016. Copyright © 2008 Marvel Characters, Inc. All rights reserved. $3.99 per copy in the U.S. (GST #R127032852) in the direct market and $4.99 per copy in the U.S. and Canada (GST #R127032852) through the newsstand; Canadian Agreement #40668537. All characters featured in this issue and the distinctive names and likenesses thereof, and all related indicia are trademarks of Marvel Characters, Inc. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. **Printed in Canada.** ALAN FINE, CEO Marvel Toys & Publishing Divisions and CMO Marvel Characters, Inc.; JIM SOKOLOWSKI, Chief Operating Officer; DAVID GABRIEL, SVP of Publishing Sales & Circulation; DAVID BOGART, SVP of Business Affairs & Talent Management; MICHAEL PASCIULLO, VP Merchandising & Communications; JIM O'KEEFE, VP of Operations & Logistics; DAN CARR, Executive Director of Publishing Technology; JUSTIN F. GABRIE, Director of Publishing & Editorial Operations; SUSAN CRESPI, Editorial Operations Manager; ALEX MORALES, Publishing Operations Manager; STAN LEE, Chairman Emeritus. For information regarding advertising in Marvel Comics or on Marvel.com, please contact Mitch Dane, Advertising Director, at mdane@marvel.com. For Marvel subscription inquiries, please call 800-217-9158.

THE SPOTLIGHT



V: Brothers In Armor: War Machine And Invincible Iron Man

After overseeing national security through the Civil War and to the conclusion of the Skrull Invasion, Tony Stark's stock has never been lower. But Jim Rhodes has a new mission in a Dark Reign world. Get a sneak preview on the upcoming tales of Marvel's armored heroes!

VI: It's The Fifties All Over Again! Return Of The Agents Of Atlas

Writer Jeff Parker and artist Carlo Pagulayan bring back the cult favorite title of 2006, and Parker is on hand to fill us in on what's new with the team and how it ties in with Dark Reign!

VII: Make Mine Mighty: Dan Slott Takes The Initiative With Mighty Avengers!

Fan favorite writer Dan Slott graduates from *Avengers: The Initiative* and takes the reins of *Mighty Avengers* from Brian Michael Bendis. What's next for Marvel's mainstream team of heroes? *Spotlight* has the goods!

VIII: Hawkeye & Mockingbird: The Reunion

Jim McCann may be new to the writing scene, but his love for two of Marvel's most tragic lovers goes back decades. Now, with the return of Mockingbird to Earth after years in Skrull captivity, he guides the rebuilding of their shattered lives in the *New Avengers: The Reunion* limited series!

CREDITS:

Head Writer/Editor: John Rhett Thomas

Spotlight Bullpen Writers: Chris Arrant, Sheila Johnson & Dugan Trodglen

Senior Editor, Special Projects: Jeff Youngquist

Editors, Special Projects: Mark D. Beazley & Jennifer Grünwald

Assistant Editors: John Denning & Cory Levine

Senior Vice President of Sales: David Gabriel

Book Design: BLAMMO! Content & Design and Brian O'Dell

Editor in Chief: Joe Quesada

Publisher: Dan Buckley

The views and opinions expressed in each issue of *Marvel Spotlight* are solely those of the writers, commentators or creative talent and do not express or imply the views or opinions of Marvel Entertainment, Inc.

EMBRACING CHANGE

PART II

By Dugan Trodglen

As The Green Goblin, He Was America's National Nightmare.

After The Skrull Invasion, He Is America's Director of National Security.

Brian Michael Bendis Helps Norman Osborn Usher In A Dark Reign.

"LISTEN, I'VE HAD SOME IDEAS THAT I THOUGHT WERE GONNA BE THE BIGGEST THINGS EVER AND NOBODY WANTED ANY PART OF THEM, SO THIS FEELS GOOD."

— Writer Brian Michael Bendis on Dark Reign enthusiasm among his peers

WHILE DARK REIGN ENCOMPASSES A WIDE RANGE OF Marvel books, our chief tour guide through the Norman Osborn-led Marvel Universe will be the man who introduced the concept: Brian Michael Bendis. After allowing Norman Osborn to become the "hero" of Secret Invasion, Brian propped him up as the biggest cop in the world. In a similar (but more sinister) way to how the Initiative sent shock waves through the Marvel Universe, the ripples of the Dark Reign will be felt throughout the MU for years to come, and it's anyone's guess how it may one day resolve.

For now, we the readers can sit back and enjoy a new chapter in the Marvel Universe saga. In the second part of our in-depth interview (the first half of which was published in last month's *Secret Invasion Aftermath*), Dark Reign architect Bendis spoke with *Spotlight* about what all this means.

SPOTLIGHT: At the end of *Civil War* we had The Initiative status quo over several books and within that you launched *Mighty Avengers* and turned *New Avengers* on its ear. Now we have *Dark Reign*, which works in a similar way. It launches *Dark Avengers* this time and once again sets *New Avengers* on a new course. All along, however, the *New Avengers* has been on a specific trajectory toward (and beyond) *Secret Invasion*. The difference is *Dark Reign* follows an event that you wrote whereas with the *Civil War* aftermath –

BRIAN: (*Interjects*.) Mark Millar walked off in a huff! (*Laughter*.) He hoisted the Initiative on us and walked out of the room!

SPOTLIGHT: As a result, how involved are you in the overall direction of *Dark Reign* as it presumably moves toward a climax in the next big crossover event (surely Norman Osborn can't be the big cheese forever!)?

BRIAN: Pretty involved. I can't stress enough that I don't write other peoples' stories for them, but as an example, Matt Fraction in particular grabbed a couple of ideas from *Secret Invasion*/*Dark Reign* to build on in *Invincible Iron Man*. What he's doing is great and I can't wait to read that book. But I would never poke at that — it's his book.

So we put out all this stuff into the Marvel Universe, particularly with the Cabal. We established six major powerhouses out there with connection to each other that no one knows about. It's a situation where some of the heroes who have never felt what it's like to be Peter Parker suddenly feel what it's like to be Peter Parker: Even when you win, you lose. That's good stuff.

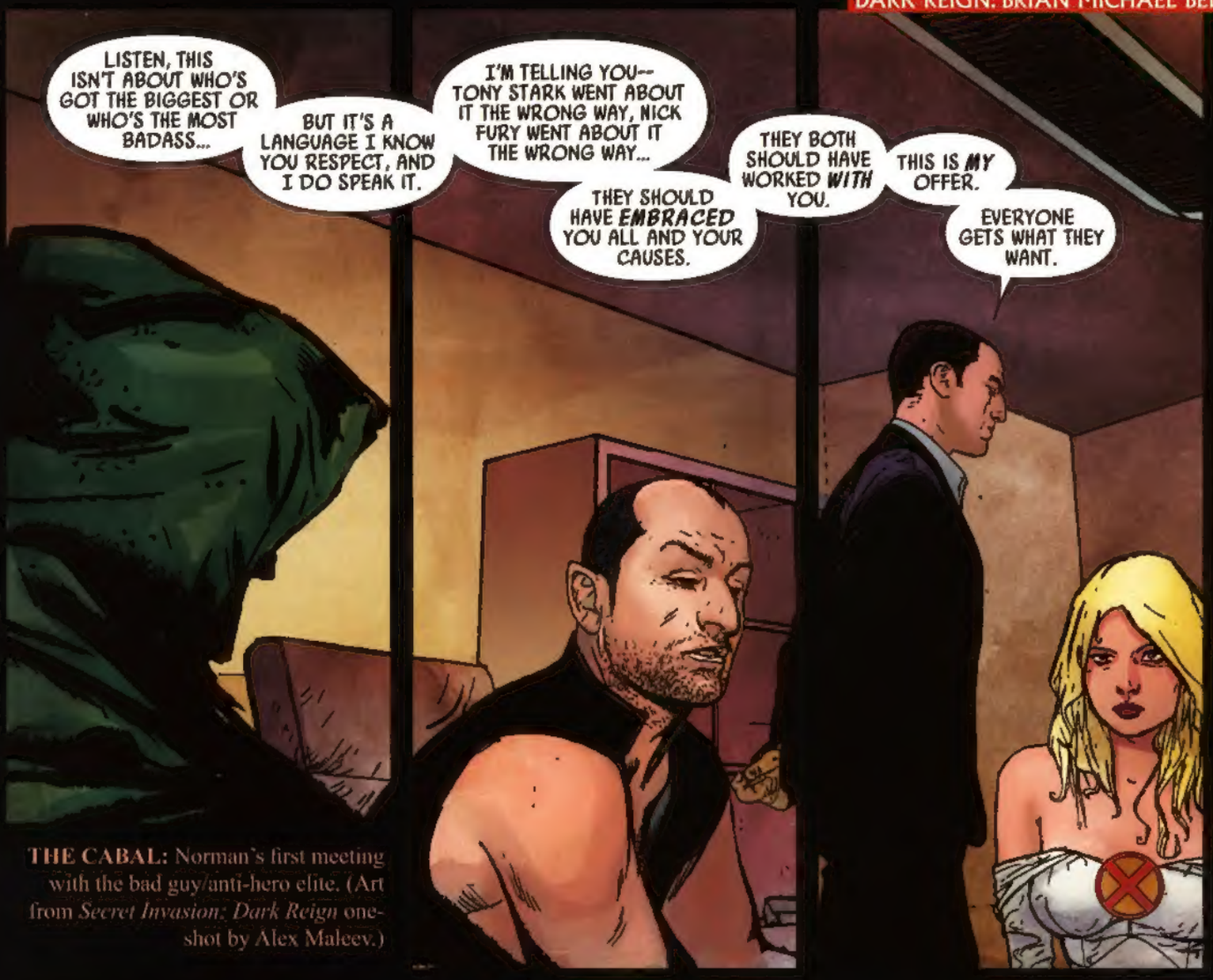
We are steamrolling toward something. Could it be the Illuminati versus the Cabal? Is Norman Osborn gonna go crazy? There's a lot to mine there. Issue 50 of *New Avengers* will be a big chapter in where we're going.

SPOTLIGHT: Again, although *Civil War* was not your doing, a lot of what has gone on in the overall Marvel Universe saga lately has been driven by your books. And now in the aftermath of *Secret Invasion*, which was a culmination of years of setup, we have a whole new world to play in. Are we presumably building towards…?

BRIAN: Is there a big story that ends this? I don't want to say exactly. There's still a lot of stories to be had here. I think when people get a sense of what *Dark Reign* means and what

"BUT ONLY ONE PERSON GOT THE KILLSHOT.
"NORMAN OSBORN.
"ALL THE NETWORKS WERE COVERING IT LIVE. EVERYONE ON THE PLANET SAW IT.
"IT WAS, QUITE LITERALLY, THE SHOT HEARD 'ROUND THE WORLD."
THUNDERBOLTS, M-MAKE SURE NONE OF THEM WEASEL AWAY.
NO LOOSE ENDS.

IN FOR THE KILL: Norman Osborn becomes a media-made sensation. (Art from *Secret Invasion #8* by Leinil Francis Yu.)


LISTEN, THIS ISN'T ABOUT WHO'S GOT THE BIGGEST OR WHO'S THE MOST BADASS...
BUT IT'S A LANGUAGE I KNOW YOU RESPECT, AND I DO SPEAK IT.
I'M TELLING YOU-- TONY STARK WENT ABOUT IT THE WRONG WAY, NICK FURY WENT ABOUT IT THE WRONG WAY...
THEY SHOULD HAVE EMBRACED YOU ALL AND YOUR CAUSES.
THEY BOTH SHOULD HAVE WORKED WITH YOU.
THIS IS MY OFFER.
EVERYONE GETS WHAT THEY WANT.

THE CABAL: Norman's first meeting with the bad guy/anti-hero elite. (Art from *Secret Invasion: Dark Reign* one-shot by Alex Maleev.)

Dark Avengers means and what their relationship to the Marvel Universe is, they'll see how many great stories there are to tell before we go anywhere else.

SPOTLIGHT: But whereas Mark turned his concept over to Marvel and said, "You all run with it," one gets the sense that this is still your story.

BRIAN: Well, I'm only in charge of the books that I write. So although in this particular world the books that I write – *New Avengers*, *Dark Avengers* and *Spider Woman: Agent of S.W.O.R.D.*– are very large chapters in this publishing initiative (as is *Secret Warriors*), I wouldn't want to take credit for what anyone else was doing within *Dark Reign*. It's flattering that people have voluntarily grabbed onto ideas and run with them; it makes me think people are digging this idea and if they are, that readers will in turn enjoy the idea, too. Listen, I've had some ideas that I thought were gonna be the biggest things ever and I've thrown them out there and nobody wanted any part of them, so this feels good.

SPOTLIGHT: But you are still a big part of the overall blueprint for where this goes within the Marvel Universe as a whole.

BRIAN: Of course! The only difference with the *Civil War* aftermath and the Initiative is that Mark's attentions were elsewhere whereas I'm very much still here. Just by that nature there's a difference.

There are people writing Dark Reign books I've never spoken to. Those books are going to be rising and falling on their own merits and God bless it.

SPOTLIGHT: You have created a nifty tradition of significant one-shots with your longtime collaborate, artist Alex Maleev: *New Avengers: The Illuminati* special, *Civil War: The Confession*, and now *Secret Invasion: Dark Reign*. Like *Confession*, it serves as an epilogue, but it also relates very well to the *Illuminati* special.

BRIAN: It's very much like a bookend to the Illuminati special. That book showed the Illuminati gathering for the first time, and it's that group's actions that helped bring about the *Secret Invasion*. Now in the wake of *SI* we have this other group, this "evil" cabal, or as Matt Fraction likes to call it The Illumi-Naughty (*Laughter.*) [*Wait, no. Groans – Ed.*] See how I threw Fraction under the bus for that one? Anyway, this group, which first appears at the end of *Secret Invasion*, gets together under Norman's auspices.

SPOTLIGHT: Let's review who we're talking about here.

BRIAN: In addition to Norman, we have Dr. Doom, The Hood, Namor, Loki (the new female version) and…Emma Frost! I'll flat out tell you that them getting together was always a plan of *Secret Invasion* and, in fact, I originally had them getting together earlier in the story; but on top of everything else, that was too much. I realized it was its own story and would be better if it were an actual result of *Secret Invasion*.

"EMMA IS THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE THING. EVERYONE IS GOING TO LOOK AT HER AND BE VERY CONFUSED." — Bendis, on Emma Frost's membership in The Cabal

DARK REIGN: IN STORES NOW

We don't want you to miss a minute of Dark Reign action, so here's a handy checklist that covers all Dark Reign titles currently on store shelves. We don't normally encourage our readers to put down their *Marvel Spotlight* and engage in other activities, but you might want to check in with your comic retailer of choice to see if any of these are still available. (That is, if you haven't got them already!)

Avengers: The Initiative #20
By Dan Slott, Christos N. Gage and Steve Kurth

Dark Reign: New Nation one-shot
By Brian Michael Bendis, Jonathan Hickman, Jeff Parker, Adam Felber, Jim McCann, Stefano Caselli, Carlo Paguyalan, Leonardo Manco Paulo Sequiera and David Lopez!

Deadpool #6
By Daniel Way and Paco Medina

Invincible Iron Man #8-9
By Matt Fraction and Salvador Larroca

Marvel Spotlight: Dark Reign
Hey! You're holding it in your hands right now!!!

Ms. Marvel #34
By Brian Reed, Adriana Melo and Paulo Siqueira

New Avengers #48
By Brian Michael Bendis and Billy Tan

Secret Invasion: Dark Reign one-shot
By Brian Michael Bendis and Alex Maleev

Secret Invasion: Requiem one-shot
By Dan Slott and Khoi Pham

War Machine #1
By Greg Pak and Leonardo Manco

DON'T MISUNDERSTAND MY INTENTIONS, STARK. I CAME HERE BECAUSE I WAS NEEDED.
I TOLD YOU I WOULD NEVER FIGHT ALONGSIDE YOU AGAIN.
I TOLD YOU I WOULD NEVER JOIN THY RANKS AGAIN.
I ABHOR WHAT THOU HAST BECOME AND I'M SURE I WILL NOT BE THE ONLY ONE WHO FINDS THE BLAME IN ALL THIS TO FALL SQUARE ON THY SHOULDERS.

So that's what we have in *Secret Invasion: Dark Reign*. It's Norman's power play. He's sitting down with these five other…I hate to say villains because none of them see themselves that way…these five other power brokers from his side of things. Norman is telling them how things are going to be and what he's going to do for them and what he wants in return. There's so much intrigue. What's Emma Frost doing in that group? Then you have Namor who is the only one who knows there's a mirror group that he himself is in! Clearly that's going to blow up in someone's face. This issue shows not only how much the power structure had changed but how crazy and savvy Norman Osborn is. A lot of the issue is from Emma's point of view. When people see that image in *Secret Invasion #8* they're going to want to know what the %&$# is Emma doing there and we deal with that right away.

SPOTLIGHT: So, why Norman Osborn? What made you decide to take him outside of Spider-Man's world and make him such a big player in the Marvel Universe?

BRIAN: Well, he was already there. Warren Ellis came up with the idea of putting him in charge of the Thunderbolts Initiative after *Civil War* – and may I highly recommend reading Norman's *Thunderbolts* issues [*Thunderbolts #110-125* and assorted one-shots; also in the collections *Faith In Monsters TPB*, *Caged Angels TPB* and *Secret Invasion: Thunderbolts TPB*]. Warren's concept put the character on a track that was very interesting. And then Warren left, and the Warren Ellis fan-fiction website in my head (which I would be running if I weren't in mainstream comics) had me leading him down that road for sure.

Then when we were planning *Secret Invasion* we got to the "Who are the winners and who are the losers?" question. The idea that someone like Norman could take the shot heard 'round the world, that of all the people trying, he's the one who gets to kill the Skrull Queen, that was too good. It would propel him into the stratosphere politically and make him a top power broker. The media would eat him up, even knowing who he is. In times of war and times of fear, we tend to say, "We know he's an %$8%&#* but we want an %$8%&#* in charge." So the Marvel Universe says, "We don't want Tony Stark, we want the freaking Green Goblin protecting us!" The PR machine gets rolling and the next thing you know Norman's in charge!

SPOTLIGHT: How did that lead to the Cabal?

BRIAN: Well, that just came from thinking, "Wouldn't it be cool if there was another secret group of folks who were their own Illuminati who represented the opposite viewpoint?" That turned into the Cabal, knowing that Norman would want to put something like this together. He wouldn't go out and put a target on his head and make the same mistakes Tony made. He'd keep these others who might threaten him closer. He'd bring them together and say, "Here's how it's going to be," and try to work with them to make the world different than what it was, and to try and hold onto his power as long as he can.

When I first pitched it, I thought the shocking member would be Namor, who is in the mirror group. But at the time we had Magneto on the team and by the time we were ready to go with this, Magneto was not available to us. So we sat around and came up with Emma. Now Emma…Emma is the whole thing! Emma is the heart and soul of the thing. Everyone is going to look at her and be very confused.

SPOTLIGHT: It's interesting that Norman has Namor there for

THE FALL: Tony Stark's stock crashes to the bottom with his hero peers after Secret Invasion. (Art from *SI #8* by Leinil Yu.)

THE HOOD: Super powers meet street smarts in the self-styled "New Kingpin," a charter member of Norman Osborn's Cabal. (Art from *New Avengers #46* by Billy Tan.)

the exact same reason Tony had him in the Illuminati.

BRIAN: Namor has always wrestled between the two worlds. He always does what is, in his opinion, best for Atlantis at the time.

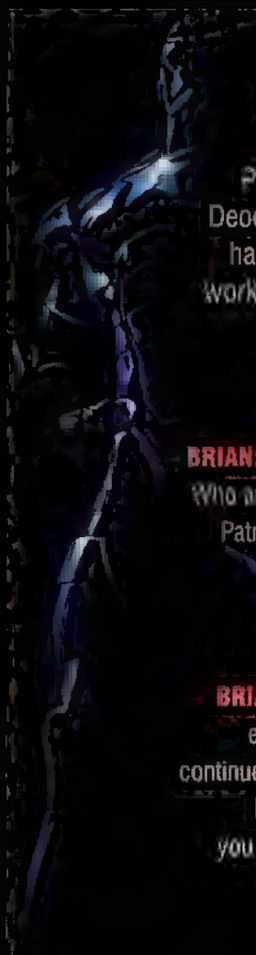
We've had lots of little sneak peeks of the *Dark Avengers* and people wondered about Norman in *Secret Invasion* and why he got so much face-time. And some people started kind of putting it together online a bit that indeed Norman would be playing a big part at the end and then coming out of *Secret Invasion*. But as that came up, people seemed to genuinely like the idea. A lot of people seem to look forward to seeing the World According to Norman. So that makes me excited. It's a unique perspective and a unique power balance.

SPOTLIGHT: Do you think that sort of mirrors what's going on in the Marvel Universe? That the readers are ready to move past Tony Stark having all that power?

BRIAN: That was more or less a self-fulfilling prophecy. I even said it at a creator retreat last year. Sometimes you sit and read a bunch of books at once and get a different idea or perspective than the writers intended. But last year, there were a bunch of books where the entirety of the book was whoever the star of the book was, Tony Stark shows up and that character yells at him. I literally read six books like that in one sitting. This was all by accident. So at the retreat I declared that Tony just had to get his ass kicked eventually. We were basically dooming him to the hell he's about to go through with all that exposure. But what makes me happy is that it's all new stories for Tony, new stories for Norman, and all kinds of things you haven't seen before.

Sounds pretty great! Thanks, Brian. We look forward to this exciting new world with Norman Osborn…especially since it's fictional! SECRET INVASION: DARK REIGN *is in stores now and is required reading. For more Dark Reign titles currently in stores (if they're not sold out, that is) check out the handy checklist on this page's sidebar!* ●

SPOTLIGHT ON DARK AVENGERS



Perhaps the most mysterious part of *Dark Reign* is a new book by Brian Michael Bendis and artist Mike Deodato: *Dark Avengers*. The first issue has yet to hit stands, so many secrets remain. As for clues, Brian has left the writing chores of *Mighty Avengers* and Mike has left behind his art duties for *Thunderbolts* to work on this new title. Could *Dark Avengers* somehow be a mix of the two ideas? No one's telling, but we managed to get a few teasers from the writer.

SPOTLIGHT: So, the Dark Avengers...Who are these guys?

BRIAN: Well, as we see on the first cover we have what looks like Spider-Man, some guy named Iron Patriot, a Wolverine. Who are these characters? Where do they come from and what do they represent? The big question is, "Who is the Iron Patriot?" Mike Deodato put an image of him up on my message board [*Insert plug for www.jinxworld.com here – Ed.*] with that question: "Who is the Iron Patriot?" And somebody answered, "That guy!" (*Laughter.*)

SPOTLIGHT: What can you say about the book? I know we can't give away too much.

BRIAN: Well, it's the most fun I've ever had writing, I'll tell you that. Mike Deodato was born to draw it. A lot of people enjoyed *Mighty* and *New Avengers* being so closely tied and at times seeming like a biweekly book. That's going to continue with *New* and *Dark Avengers*. *Dark Avengers* is going to have a completely different flavor than *Mighty Avengers*, but like *Mighty*, it will be closely connected. Even closer, in fact. Not scenes overlapping but scenes connecting. If you only read one title you'll be fine, but if you read them both you'll think, "Wow, this is a lot of fun." You'll have more information than the lead characters in the books.

WHO IS THE IRON PATRIOT?

Good question? Here are a few possible good answers...and they're a lot better than "That guy!"

TONY STARK

With Iron Man more or less humiliated out of his job as director of S.H.I.E.L.D. (and S.H.I.E.L.D. itself disbanded under his watch), Tony Stark is persona non grata in the world peacekeeping community. It may take a new identity for Tony to redeem himself.

NORMAN OSBORN

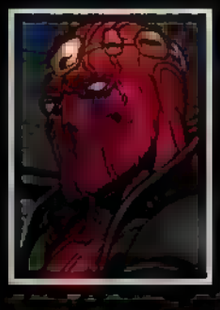
Norman is the new power broker of the super-human community. Might the Dark Avengers be his handpicked team of Avengers, with he himself in the lead?

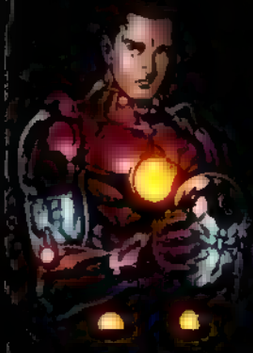
STEVE ROGERS

He's been gone for going on two years now, but Bucky Barnes is just getting going as a compelling new Captain America. Might Iron Patriot be the identity the original Cap uses if he were to somehow make a triumphant return to the Marvel Universe? It wouldn't be the first time he's used another alias (see Nomad and The Captain).

BARON ZEMO

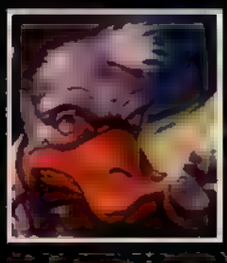
The reveal at the end of *Thunderbolts #1* that they were indeed the Masters of Evil and that their leader Citizen V was in fact Baron Zemo was an iconic moment in Marvel history, but we haven't seen much of ol' Helmut lately. Wouldn't he be a great choice for Norman to put in charge of the Avengers, bringing his story full circle?





KANG

Speaking of cool reveals and folks we haven't seen in a while, how about Iron Lad of the Young Avengers, the version of Kang the Conqueror from the future that was still young and full of hope? Eager fans of YA have been waiting for his return from the future to whence he returned (makes sense if ya been readin' *Young Avengers*, bunky!) If he made this return behind the armor of the Iron Patriot, well...that would be interesting, wouldn't it?



HOWARD THE DUCK

Nah, they wouldn't...would they? No, they definitely wouldn't. Ahhh, but Bendis isn't "they," maybe he would! [*Just checked with Bendis. He wouldn't. – Ed.*]

A NEW REIGN

Looking Ahead At The World Of Captain America, Luke Cage, Doctor Strange And The Rest Of The New Avengers

By Dugan Trodglen with John Rhett Thomas

If in "Avengers Disassembled" the old order changeth (and boy, did it changeth), then what happens when the *new* order changeth in a Dark Reign kind of world? Must we make room on our reading lists for *New* New Avengers? No, we don't have to go that far, because implicit in the word "new" is reinvention, reordering and change. And speaking of change, that's just what Norman Osborn's asking us to do: Embrace it. (Now. Or else!)

Just when the United States ushers in a new president in January to occupy the Oval Office, Marvel maestro Brian Michael Bendis reorders the political power landscape of the Marvel Universe, and *New Avengers* (as usual) is a central locus point for the continuing action. As part of our Bendis-palooza interview, we asked the scribe to give us a few insights into *NA* as it heads towards its 50th issue extravaganza (and along the way we offer up a few spoilers for *Dark Avengers*, so be warned!)

"ED WAS REALLY COOL ABOUT ME USIN
HIM TO THE TEAM BECAUSE OF THE NO
AVENGERS ARE REALLY CAP'S TEAM, A
TO BE CAP HE SHOULD BE WITH HIS TE

ENGERS:
G CAP AND ADDING
TION THAT THE
AND IF HE'S TRYING
AM!
— Bendis on incorporating Cap into the New Avengers

SPOTLIGHT: We concluded the *Secret Invasion Aftermath* portion of our interview last issue discussing the kidnapping of Luke Cage and Jessica Jones' baby by the Jarvis-Skrull. This story is continued in *New Avengers #48*.

BRIAN: I know some people might appreciate a more close-ended story, with issues like the baby being resolved in *Secret Invasion*, but Stan never did it that way and I seem incapable of it. Yeah, sure I want you to come back and read the next issue of *New Avengers*! (*Laughter.*)

Listen, as a father of two, I can't imagine anything more horrible than not knowing where your child is. The story gets very desperate and very personal and Luke's gonna have to make some harsh decisions because nothing is more important than getting that baby back. How do you find someone that can change shape in one of the biggest cities in the world?

SPOTLIGHT: A new team of New Avengers also debuted in that issue.

BRIAN: Yes, we meet the new New Avengers including the addition of Bucky/Cap. He is sort of the new benefactor and they are based in Cap's house in the Bronx. Mockingbird will be joining the team, as will Spider-Woman and Ms. Marvel. Iron Fist says he's leaving, but he's still there and I've written five issues since *Secret Invasion*! (*Laughter.*)

SPOTLIGHT: Seems like Echo is missing

BRIAN: They don't know where Echo is. They called her but she hasn't called back. She's screening her calls. I don't think she had a real good time in *Secret Invasion*. You know sometimes you have a bad night out with your friends and you don't want to call them for a while? *(Laughter.)* You will find out where Echo is in *Spider-Woman, Agent of S.W.O.R.D.*

SPOTLIGHT: The new Captain America joining the team is kind of a big deal.

BRIAN: It's a very big deal.

SPOTLIGHT: What does it mean to bring him onto the New Avengers?

BRIAN: It means a number of things. Number one, if you're not reading Ed Brubaker's *Captain America*, you're missing one of the great runs of this generation of comics and probably the greatest run on *Captain America* ever..

SPOTLIGHT: No argument there. [*Yeah, no argument here, either. – Ed.*]

BRIAN: And in it, what Ed has done is create this character – Winter Soldier/Bucky/Captain America – that is Captain America through and through yet has this young vivaciousness with all of his interactions with the Marvel Universe being new. The rest of the Marvel Universe reacts to the costume before they react to the human being, while the human being is in there trying to find his way. Love it. Love it, love it, love it! So Ed and I had a talk where I reminded him of every favor I've ever done for him in his life. (*Laughter.*) But he was really cool about me using Cap and adding him to the team because of the notion that the Avengers are really Cap's team, and if he's trying to be Cap he should be with his team. Being an Avenger is perhaps the most important aspect of his character. Who found Captain America? The first faces he saw were the Avengers.

Also, because the Avengers have no physical home, Ed offered to give them his house, which I thought was great. We have this military man who likes things neat and clean dealing with these slobs and baby poop and all this other stuff. There's some good roommate humor coming. The interactions are fantastic.

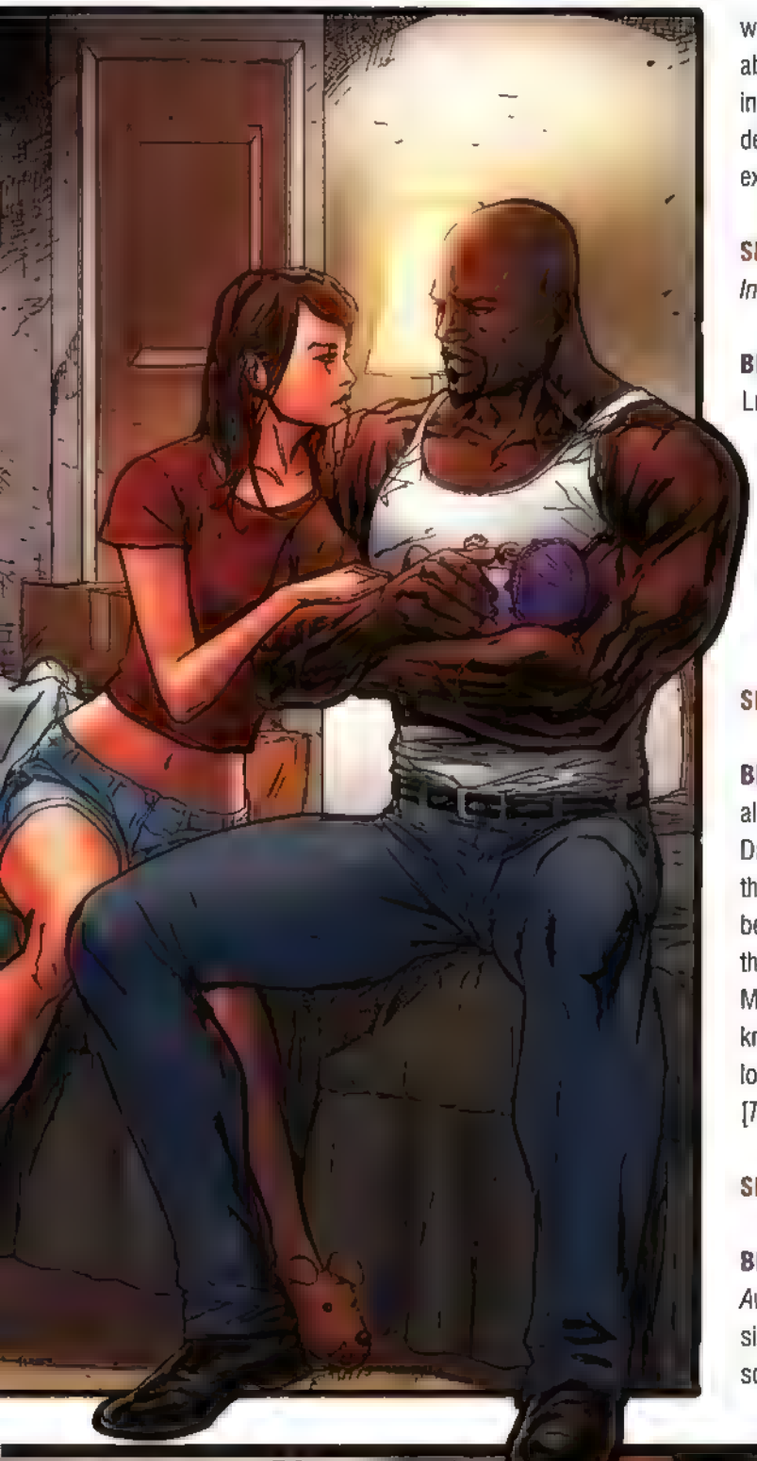
SPOTLIGHT: I imagine it's a bit overwhelming for Clint Barton with Steve Rogers having been more or less his idol.

BRIAN: That scene in *Captain America* that Ed wrote where Clint confronts Bucky was the inspiration for even going down this road. I was like, "Now this is great stuff."

SPOTLIGHT: It may be less of a big deal than Cap, but it is certainly interesting that Ms. Marvel is going from poster girl for registration to working with the underground Avengers.

BRIAN: To me it's a gigantic deal. Here's a military character

"I LIKE TO BLOW SOMETHING UP AND STAY A WHILE, BECAUSE WHAT HAPPENS AFTER STUFF IS BLOWN UP IS ALWAYS MORE INTERESTING!" — *Bendis on embracing change*



who has dedicated her life to something that right now she absolutely cannot be a part of. That is very dramatically illustrated in *Dark Avengers #1*. You see Carol at a true crossroads and it's devastating. She's dedicated her life to military service and been so excellent at it and none of that matters.

SPOTLIGHT: The new team is immediately hit with a crisis of *Secret Invasion* fallout.

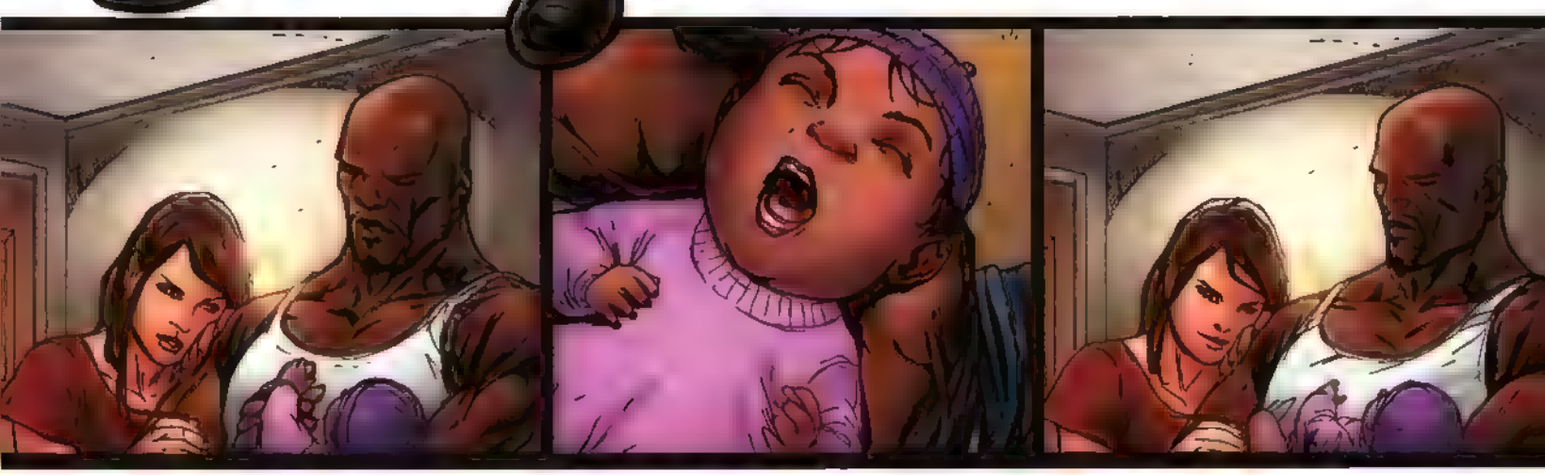
BRIAN: Before they can decide what their agenda is, the race to find Luke Cage and Jessica Jones' baby is on! Luke and Jessica show up panicked out of their minds looking for their baby. They go to Reed Richards pleading for a Skrull detector and they literally run around the city shaking every tree until Luke finally goes to a certain individual and says, "Please, I'll do whatever you want, but please help me find my baby." You turn the page and it's Norman Osborn. He has Venom and Bullseye behind him. It's so cool.

SPOTLIGHT: What is the story for the team going forward?

BRIAN: The team tries to help Luke Cage without much luck but they also, as a result of Luke going to Norman, become hyper-aware of the Dark Avengers. This sets off a chain reaction of events and basically the New Avengers would like to kill the Dark Avengers. The wrestling between those teams takes over both books. On top of that there is the return of Dr. Strange, the question of just who is the Master of the Mystic Arts, as well as the return of the Hood and that gang. Now we know the secret power behind the Hood is Dormammu. So there's a lot going on: A lot of characters, a lot of romance, a lot of *meshuga*. [*That's Yiddish for craziness, folks! –Ed.*]

SPOTLIGHT: You've got Billy Tan working with you on this

BRIAN: He's doing a great job, and if all goes according to plan, *New Avengers #50* will be a jam issue as well. It's going to be double-sized and we're in the planning stages of how we're doing the fight scene. We want a page or double-page spread of each character



CHILD BORN, CHILD LOST: Though mainly a character study of Luke Cage, Jessica Jones and their romantic bonds in flashback, *New Avengers #47* also featured the devastating reaction to their baby's abduction by Skrulls after the battle in Central Park (Art from *NA #47* by Billy Tan)

drawn by an artist associated with that character so we get a real good sense of each character individually. It's a nice celebration of the book.

SPOTLIGHT: Fifty issues already. Amazing.

BRIAN: It's amazing I haven't been fired! (*Laughter.*)

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of which, long runs are a rarity these days. A lot of writers like to hop in and tell a single story…

BRIAN: *cough*Mark Millar*cough*Jeph Loeb!

SPOTLIGHT: (*Laughter.*) I didn't say that. You did! [*He didn't say anything, he coughed it! (Either that or we need to fire our transcriptionist.) — Ed.*] But what is it that appeals to you about telling these long stories that cover years on books like *New Avengers*, *Daredevil*, and of course *Ultimate Spider-Man*?

BRIAN: First of all, the opportunity is a gift beyond comprehension that I would even be allowed to do this for a living. My relationship and history with Marvel allow me something that not a lot of my peers have: Long, uninterrupted runs on books that thankfully have enough people buying them to let me continue.

With that comes the idea that everything I've ever loved in comics came from a lengthy run, whether it was Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* or Frank Miller's *Daredevil* or whatever. I like the bob and weave of different kinds of stories you can tell. And what I really love is that these characters are so rich and complex that to really explore them you have to spend some time; you can't just hit and run. With the hit-and-run, all you're gonna do is get the most iconic version of the character. Blow something up and leave. I like to blow something up and stay a while, because what happens after stuff is blown up is always more interesting.

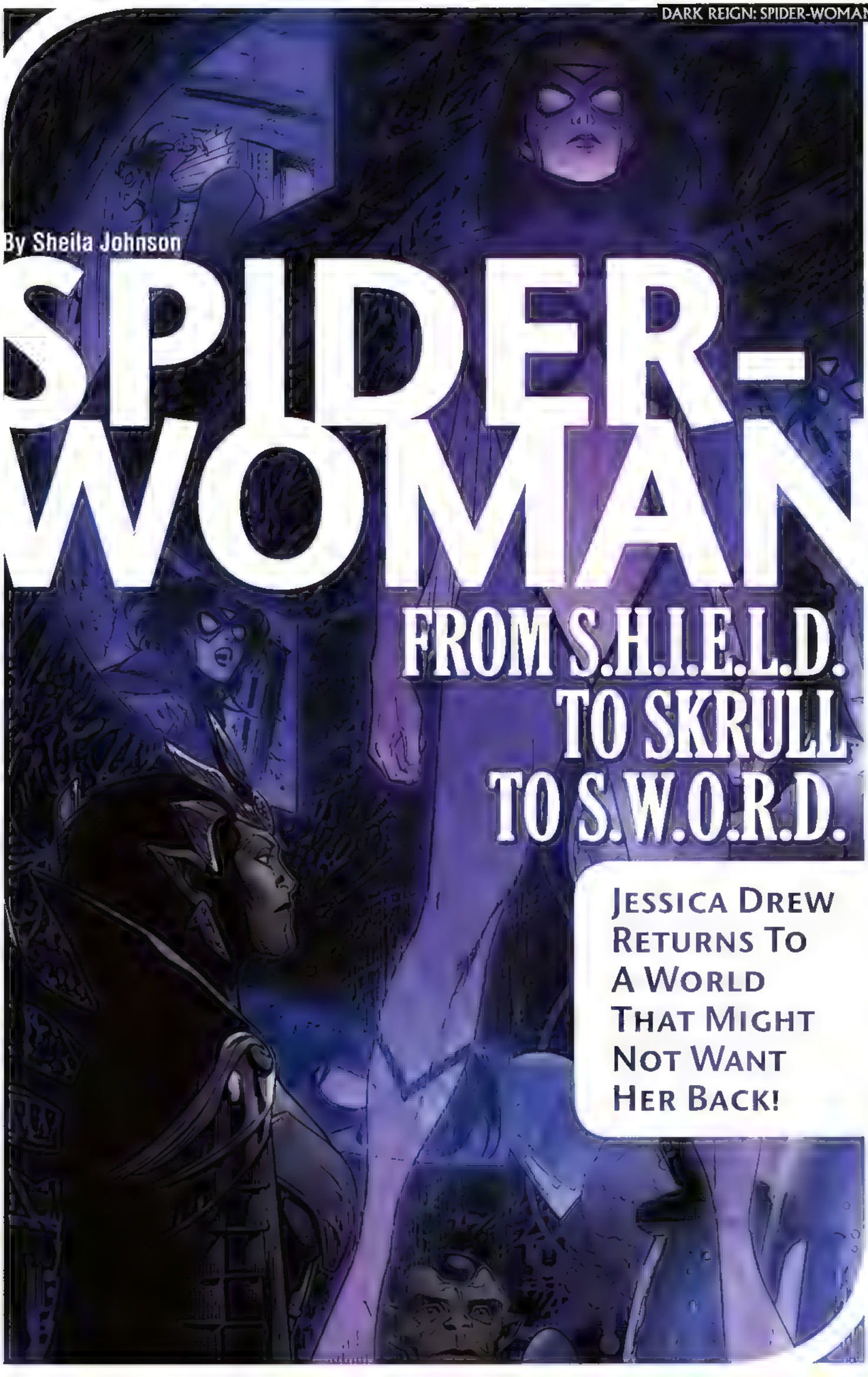
SPOTLIGHT: And that applied even more to a team book like *New Avengers*, where you have several characters to get to know.

BRIAN: Of course. I'm at a crossroads now with two long-term books. With *Ultimatum* going on, this is certainly a place where I can jump off *Ultimate Spider-Man;* but then I think, "Oh no, it's about to get interesting! I don't want to leave!" Same thing with *New Avengers*. Every time I think that maybe it's time to move on to something else, I'll think, "No way! *Secret Invasion*'s over and things are gonna get really good!" That feeling propels me. If I ever felt like I was blanking and had nothing to say I would graciously bail out. There is something about my constitution as a human being that I want to stay with these things.

It became clear to me some time ago that I could cure cancer and the first line of my obituary would be "*Ultimate Spider-Man* writer." That's all right. That's pretty awesome, so I want to put as much into that for as long as possible. I'm really looking forward to that really uncomfortable meeting with Joe Quesada and Dan Buckley, my bosses, when it's way past time for me to go and they have to break the news to me and I'm totally unaware of how despised my work has become and what an embarrassment I am. Awkward!

After close examination of the monthly comics sales charts — where NEW AVENGERS, MIGHTY AVENGERS, SECRET INVASION *and other Bendis or Bendis-related titles are perennially ensconced — Spotlight analysts have determined that day is a long ways off. But there is one day that is not far off:* NEW AVENGERS #49, *released in a couple weeks' time from the release of this Spotlight ish. And hot on its heels in February, the double-sized 50th issue extravaganza of NA by Bendis and Billy Tan! We'll see ya there, because you know that's where we'll be!* ●

CAP IS BACK! Bucky Barnes joins the New Avengers, returning the iconography of Captain America to the team that Steve Rogers once led in battle. (Cover art to *New Avengers #48* by Billy Tan.)



By Sheila Johnson

SPIDER-WOMAN

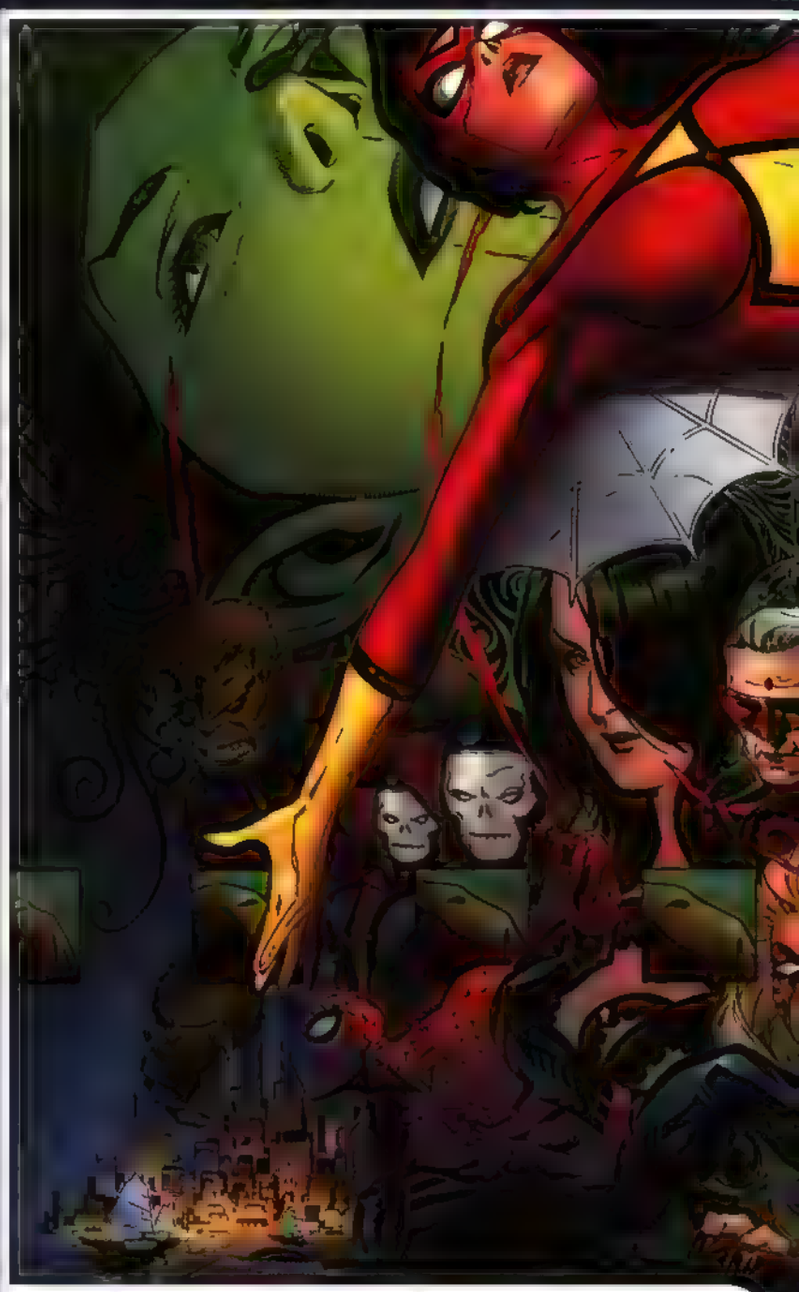
FROM S.H.I.E.L.D. TO SKRULL TO S.W.O.R.D.

JESSICA DREW RETURNS TO A WORLD THAT MIGHT NOT WANT HER BACK!

Throughout 2008, the characters of the Marvel Universe found themselves struggling against chaotic forces as a Skrull invasion of Earth caused their world's infrastructure to crumble and their close emotional bonds with each other to wither under doubt and distrust. *Secret Invasion* saw beloved characters tested in ways that left readers holding their collective breath – and at the center of it all lurked Spider-Woman, a well-known but lesser-used Marvel personality whose guise was being worn by Queen Veranke, leader of the Skrull forces.

While Veranke used the Spider-Woman identity to infiltrate the super-hero legions, Jessica Drew waited, having been abducted by the Skrulls and left helpless as every personal and professional foundation she had laid was essentially destroyed. But now that the main events of *Secret Invasion* have drawn to a close, and the "Dark Reign" is falling over the MU, Jessica Drew, the original Spider-Woman, is returning to Earth to deal with the aftermath of a war she never fought in. In this new ongoing series, she will get the chance to redeem herself and the image destroyed by the Skrull impostor.

Set to launch in spring of 2009, *Spider-Woman: Agent of S.W.O.R.D.* will be written by Brian Michael Bendis, who penned *Secret Invasion* as well as the recent limited series that explored Jessica Drew's early years, *Spider-Woman: Origin*. The new Spider-Woman ongoing will be drawn by Bendis loyalist Alex Maleev, who previously joined the writer for a much-heralded run on *Daredevil*. *Spider-Woman: Agent of S.W.O.R.D.* will take an intimate look at the heroine as she tries to rebuild a life that, for months, she has not participated in. To do so, the series will draw on details and aspects of Jessica Drew's life from the character's early days to her modern appearances to show how she became the woman readers know today.



WHO IS SPIDER-WOMAN? Jessica Drew returns to a world that knows her as a Skrull impostor. (Art from *NA #42* by Jim Cheung.)

THE PAST

The Jessica Drew that Bendis so clearly enjoyed writing in *Secret Invasion* and *New Avengers* could not have existed had Bendis not enjoyed the stories of the Jessica Drew that first appeared in February 1977.

"Even as a child," Bendis recalls, "I remember feeling, you know, these female knock-offs of popular characters are often the cheapest and juiciest way to create something...But with Spider-Woman, from the get-go, there's something else going on here. Something that could've easily been silly and cheesy had been given its own mythology. The costume was new, there was no relation to Peter Parker... and her place in the Marvel Universe is always an odd place, almost like she was in her own little world."

Spider-Woman was indeed a different type of star character for Marvel. Debuting as the headliner of *Marvel Spotlight #32*, the skull cap-wearing Spider-Woman (also called Arachne) briefly seemed to be a villain, an agent of HYDRA sent to kill Nick Fury. Only when Nick Fury shocked some sense into her did Spider-Woman – and the book's readership – realize that she had actually been tricked into

"BECAUSE OF THE SKRULLS' PLA
SPIDER-WOMAN HAS BECOME T

service by HYDRA's leader, Count Otto Vermis, who had gained her trust by protecting her from a mob of angry villagers suspicious of her powers. After that, Spider-Woman abandoned HYDRA to learn more about herself and her place in the world (though she soon succumbed to Vermis's hypnotic influence again for a brief time).

Although her first interactions with Marvel characters were legendary, her actual origin story was hardly beyond reinterpretation. As Bendis reminds us, "There are three different origins of the character," all of which can be read today. According to *Marvel Spotlight #32* (published in February 1977), Spider-Woman was created when the High Evolutionary turned a spider into a young woman through an accelerated evolutionary process. This origin, for whatever reason, met with disfavor, and Jessica Drew was rewritten in *Spider-Woman #1* (published in April 1978) as a scientist's child who suffered from radiation poisoning and was given an experimental spider serum as treatment.

When Bendis was given the opportunity to write the story of the character he so loved, he changed her origin yet again. The first of the five-issue limited series *Spider-Woman: Origin* was released in December of 2005. Among other revisions, the series updated the source of Jessica's powers, casting her again as the child of scientists but this time declaring that her powers resulted from her mother, still pregnant with Jessica, being hit by a laser beam that carried the genetic code of different spiders.

Yet all of the changes made to Jessica Drew's background still feed the notion of Spider-Woman as an enigma with no fixed station in the human world. Whether a construct of the High Evolutionary or a child affected by the wayward wanderings of science, she remained different from those around her, almost alienated. She has walked on both the good and evil sides of the line and throughout her time has worked as a bounty hunter, private investigator, and agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. The question of whether she could be trusted by those fighting for good always had the potential to resurface. "She was trained as an agent of HYDRA, raised as an agent of S.H.I.E.L.D., and she was always somewhere in between not fully trusted by anybody, but not fully mistrusted either," Bendis says.

THE PRESENT

Spider-Woman's subtlety and early dabblings in evil ways made her the perfect candidate for Queen Veranke of the Skrulls to replace; in a period of instability and suspicion like the one initiated in *Secret Invasion*, a double agent such as Jessica Drew would fit right in, and a double agent with knowledge of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s inner workings would be a valuable identity to assume. Her qualities even helped to create an opportune moment for the Skrulls to abduct her; they did so after she had gone undercover on a mission from S.H.I.E.L.D. to infiltrate a HYDRA cell.

All of her talents for subterfuge, stealth, and combat, however, will not be able to make her return to Earth

AN AND VERANKE'S ROLE IN IT, THE REPRESENTATION OF EVIL..."

any easier. Because of the Skrulls' plan and Veranke's role in it, Spider-Woman has become the representation of evil; her associations with other super heroes will be thrown into question, and her personal relationships will forever be changed as a result of it. "Weeks, months, maybe years go by where she's been out of the loop, and the essence of her has been used as the face of the invasion," Bendis explains. "Jessica comes back to a world not really knowing what her relationships are, and the people who love her don't even know how to react to her.

"She is now more screwed over than any other character in the history of the Marvel Universe... and what do you do with that? Do you get a prize? No."

THE FUTURE

Jessica Drew may not win any prizes for returning to Earth, but she will get the chance to prove herself both as the human being her friends once knew and the force of good her fellow super heroes once fought alongside, all of which will be seen in *Spider-Woman: Agent of S.W.O.R.D.* "Jessica will be in a very dark place in the first issue of her series," Bendis promises, a fitting place considering that this will be one of the titles Marvel will launch as part of the much-discussed Dark Reign era.

To convey the darkness that Jessica will be struggling with, Alex Maleev has been enlisted as the artist for the series. Many will find this appropriate: His gravel, haunting style, which instantly brings to mind the shadowy textures of classic film noir, lent a stark, unsettling edge to *Daredevil*, a mood which will definitely fit Jessica's current mindset. "That, and he draws the best Jessica Drew ever," Bendis enthuses.

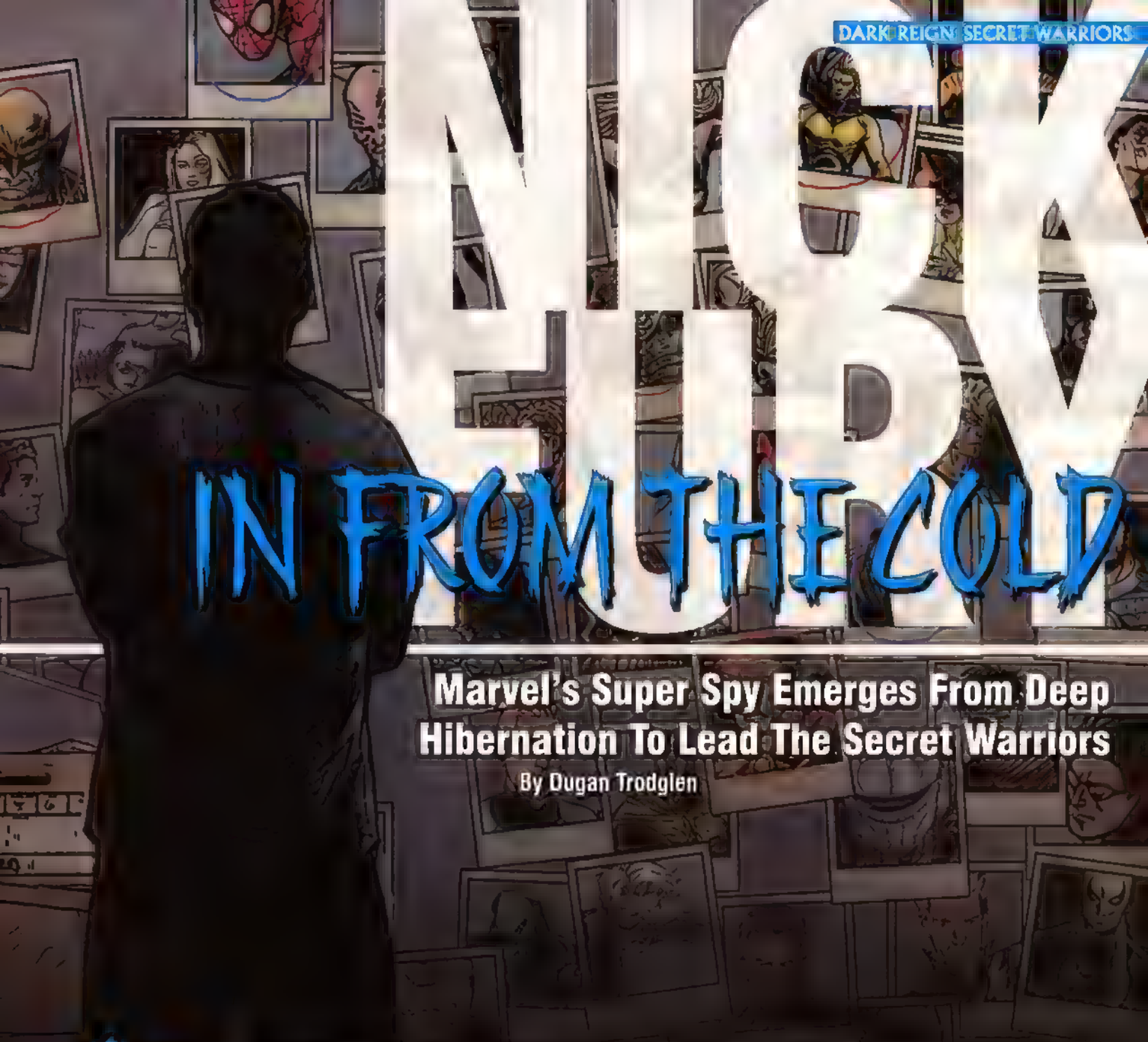
The darkness will certainly not be limited to Jessica Drew; the titular agency S.W.O.R.D. (Sentient World Observation and Response Department) is also recovering from the events of *Secret Invasion*. As Bendis explains, "S.W.O.R.D. is an invention of Joss Whedon," an invention which first appeared in Whedon's *Astonishing X-Men* and is what Bendis describes as "S.H.I.E.L.D for outer space." After *Astonishing X-Men*, S.W.O.R.D. re-emerged in *Secret Invasion* #1 when "The Peak" – the organization's orbiting center of operation – was destroyed by the Skrull operative posing as Dum-Dum Dugan. The catastrophic event required the resourceful Special Agent Abigail Brand to sneak onto a passing Skrull ship and assist the imprisoned Reed Richards.

Having suffered terrible casualties in the fake Dugan's attack, S.W.O.R.D. will be seen regrouping in *Spider-Woman: Agent of S.W.O.R.D.*, with one of their tasks being to enlist the now-returned Jessica Drew. "Jessica will be offered an opportunity to be one of the only S.W.O.R.D. agents on Earth, going around and looking for and taking care of any alien shenanigans," says Bendis. "It's a very cathartic experience that she gets to, without rules, take out any alien that doesn't belong here."

Yet as beneficial as working as a counter-alien agent may be for Spider-Woman, the job will not be the area of her life in which the greatest challenges lie. "The real mission is finding herself and finding out who she is," Bendis says. It's a mission that makes an ongoing series such as *Spider-Woman: Agent of S.W.O.R.D.* a prime way to follow the character and give fans of Spider-Woman the treat they've been waiting for. ●

EXCEPT THAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING YOU FOR THREE DAYS.
I THOUGHT IT WAS TWO.
IT'S BEEN A WEEK.
THAT REALLY CREEPS ME OUT EVEN MORE THAN THE OTHER THING.
HEY, WHAT CAN I TELL YOU? IT'S THE TIMES WE LIVE IN.
YOU IN?
SO NOW I'LL BE A *TRIPLE* AGENT.
HYDRA, S.H.I.E.L.D., AND I'M REPORTING BACK TO YOU, WHO WORKS FOR NO ONE.

ALEX MALEEV: The artist of the upcoming Spider-Woman series first depicted her in *Mighty Avengers #12*.



NICK FURY
IN FROM THE COLD

Marvel's Super Spy Emerges From Deep Hibernation To Lead The Secret Warriors

By Dugan Trodglen

One of the most anticipated titles springing up during Dark Reign is *Secret Warriors*, co-written by Brian Michael Bendis and Marvel newcomer Jonathan Hickman. The new ongoing series will follow former S.H.I.E.L.D. head Nick Fury, now working below radar without any agency to back him up, and his young team of superhuman operatives. The Warriors themselves came from Nick's "Caterpillar" file of superhuman offspring he knew could go one way or the other on the hero/villain scale. His plan was to merely monitor their progress (they in fact had not been aware of their abilities), but when the Secret Invasion hit, he knew he could turn to them as players who were guaranteed not to have been replaced by Skrulls.

In *Mighty Avengers #13*, Daisy Johnson (herself recruited during the *Secret War* limited series) went about recruiting the rest of the "Caterpillars" and they exploded onto the scene on the unforgettable final page of *Secret Invasion #4*. Now, in the aftermath of the war with the Skrulls, Nick has taken his team underground to work Nick's own agenda. If you like espionage with your super-powers, look no further!

Brian Michael Bendis has his hand in a lot of what's going on in Dark Reign, and in *Secret Warriors* he's co-plotting the book with his own handpicked co-conspirator Jonathan Hickman. *Spotlight* got Brian to let us in a bit on the genesis of the intriguing new series.

SPOTLIGHT: You're helping launch the new *Secret Warriors* book, featuring Nick Fury and his young crew. Your co-writer will be Jonathan Hickman. How does that job break down?

BRIAN: I'm just co-plotting. Jonathan is scripting and I can't speak highly enough about what he's doing. I think Jonathan is a wonderful writer. I've been reading his stuff at Image and was very attracted to the idea of him coming to Marvel for my own selfish reason of wanting to read a Jonathan Hickman Marvel book. Alex Maleev and I had created these "Secret Warriors" in *Mighty Avengers*, and had gotten Nick Fury back in that way I like, with a new status quo. That's what I like about all of these comebacks: Mockingbird, Spider-Woman and Nick Fury all have something new to do. With Nick, we're not just doing Steranko again...For better for worse, who knows? But I think it's important to at least try to find new areas of storytelling.

But when the idea came to do an ongoing book with Nick and these new characters, Marvel said, "Hey, how about this Jonathan Hickman guy you've been talking about?", because I physically couldn't write it with my workload. But I had tons of ideas for this book. So you know what I did? I did to Jonathan what Bill Jemas did for me on my first few issues of *Ultimate Spider-Man*: I gave him a bunch of ideas and literally said, "Take the ones you like the most." That is our relationship on the book. He's writing it but he is gravitating to some of my stronger ideas, which I'm thrilled about. I read the first script and I think people are going to love it. It's a super hero spy book! And they're new characters but they are legacy characters; they're entrenched in the Marvel Universe.

SPOTLIGHT: Right. When you introduced them they were all tied to existing characters. The one legacy that has not yet been revealed is Stonewall.

BRIAN: Yeah, that one's going to be revealed in the first story arc as will what's gonna happen with Phobos and Ares and all kinds of stuff. There's going to be a whopper at the end of the first issue!

SPOTLIGHT: And this will be all of the characters introduced in *Mighty Avengers* and used in *Secret Invasion*?

BRIAN: There will be some new characters. Well, there's one coming and one going: you don't lip off to Nick Fury. You open your mouth, you're out. You come back to work the next day and there's no one there; it's an empty barbershop. (*Laughter.*)

SPOTLIGHT: Nick seems to have a lot of those.

BRIAN: If you're in the city, and there's a barbershop with an old barbershop chair, Nick Fury's probably in the basement. (*Laughter.*)

SPOTLIGHT: Who's drawing *Secret Warriors*?

BRIAN: Stefano Casselli. In addition to *Avengers: The Initiative*, he drew *Mighty Avengers #18*, which features Nick training the Secret Warriors. If you like that issue, I think you're gonna love what Jonathan and Stefano do with the *Secret Warriors* book.

SPOTLIGHT: Stefano is great with younger characters.

BRIAN: Yes, he is. As is our cover artist, Mr. Jimmy Cheung!

ROUNDING UP THE CATERPILLARS: Nick Fury rounds up his Secret Warriors in the pages of *Mighty Avengers #13*.

BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS' SECRET WEAPON: JONATHAN HICKMAN

Jonathan Hickman is new to Marvel, save a story in the *Legion of Monsters* series. He is best known for his creator-owned Image series such as *Nightly News* and *Pax Romana*, and counts among his fans Brian Bendis, who lobbied Marvel to find work for Jonathan. Well, it all worked out, and February sees the debut of his all-new *Secret Warriors* series. *Spotlight* talked to Jonathan about landing the gig and how he approaches this unique series.

SPOTLIGHT: At Brian Michael Bendis' behest, Marvel contacted you about writing *Secret Warriors*. Did it come as a surprise? Had you had an eye on writing for Marvel at all?

JONATHAN: Total surprise. He had mentioned on a podcast that he thought I'd be perfect for a S.H.I.E.L.D. book, and I'd been bugging him (and striking out) about us doing something together. I e-mailed him one day about it and he replied back, "Call me. I've got something better."

So, truer words and all that.

SPOTLIGHT: This is your first Marvel work and you have the aid of Brian Bendis co-plotting. Has that helped your transition into working with company characters as opposed to your own creations? How has that transition been?

JONATHAN: I tell myself that it's only writing – a different set of parameters and rules – but still just writing. However, if I get

"...sentimentality hasn't really gotten the job done for Fury, so I wouldn't look for a lot of fatherly mentoring."

–Writer Jonathan Hickman on Fury's leadership role with the Secret Warrior 'Caterpillars'

BASIC TRAINING: Fury's charges case a SHIELD convoy in this dramatic layout by *Secret Warriors* artist Stefano Caselli. (Art from *Mighty Avengers* #18.)

stuck or I need to bounce something off Brian, I know I can just call him up. He's made things about as painless as possible. Smart, very insightful, guy.

SPOTLIGHT: There have been several Marvel books featuring newly introduced younger characters in the last few years — *Runaways*, *Young Avengers*, *Avengers: The Initiative* to name a few. How does *Secret Warriors* distinguish itself?

JONATHAN: The most obvious difference is the tone of the book. But also, this actually isn't as 'younger character' dominated as much as those other books. The cast for the story grows significantly as the first arc unfolds.

SPOTLIGHT: Guiding these youngsters is Nick Fury, an old warhorse without much experience working with young, inexperienced kids. What does he think of his role and how does he approach it?

JONATHAN: It's a means to an end. Up to this point, sentimentality hasn't really gotten the job done for Fury, so I wouldn't look for a lot of fatherly mentoring. Nick Fury has an objective to achieve, nothing matters more.

SPOTLIGHT: Youth and espionage is a unique combination. How do you approach reconciling these two components?

JONATHAN: We won't be. They don't go together -- that's the rub.

SPOTLIGHT: What about the "Secret" aspect? As a super-spy Nick is used to working below the radar when need be, but almost always in the service of a larger organization. He's working for himself and his view of the betterment of the world. How does this affect his mission?

JONATHAN: Secrecy is everything. Fury's plan hinges on him being the only one who knows what's really going on.

Here's a quote from the first issue: "We gather information. We gather information and we do it without being seen. We do this because when you know all there is to know about your enemies, and they know nothing about you, there is no situation you can't control."

It's the number one rule: you don't get your picture taken. Let's see how long that lasts.

Sounds ominous! See what Jonathan is talking about when SECRET WARRIORS *hits the spinner racks in February with its very first issue! But if you want a taste of what's in store, check out* MIGHTY AVENGERS #19 *and the* DARK REIGN: NEW NATION *one-shot, which feature Bendis, Hickman and Caselli's first salvo of* SW *action!*

MEET THE

DRUID

He's the son of the late Dr. Druid, a powerful sorcerer. So far, the offspring has shown he has a long way to go before harnessing magic the way his father did.

PHOBOS

The only other member we've previously seen, Phobos is the son of Ares and was first seen in his pop's limited series a few years back (the awesome *Ares* by Michael Avon Oeming). The youngest member at only ten years old, he discovered he is the "God of Fear" (and has the ability to terrify anyone by looking them in the eye) thanks to Nick and Daisy. Look out for this one.

SECRET WARRIORS

QUAKE

(Real name: Daisy Johnson)

Life has been pretty crazy for Ms. Johnson ever since Nick first recruited her as part of his *Secret War* in the series of the same name. She joined several A-listers on a mission to Latveria, a mission that led to Nick going off the grid for years until his return in *Secret Invasion*. The daughter of super-villain Mr. Hyde, Quake has the power to cause tremors, whether as earthquakes sending shockwaves through the ground, or deadly quakes inside an adversary's own head. Nick sent her out to recruit the rest of the team on the outset of the Skrull invasion.

STONEWALL

Stonewall was the final recruit and he remains even more mysterious than the others. All we know is he has superhuman strength, that Daisy found him in jail for assaulting a police officer, and he is apparently the son of a major character. That last point is obviously something the new series will be dealing with.

YO YO

Yo Yo is the daughter of super-villain the Griffin. She runs at superhuman speed before "yo-yoing" back to where she started.

HELLFIRE

The old West hero version of Ghost Rider was later re-christened the Phantom Rider to avoid confusion with Johnny Blaze (didn't really work). Hellfire is his descendant and has the ability to charge objects with (perhaps unholy) fire. His object of choice is his chain, which he wields as quite an impressive weapon.

BROTHERS I

"...an appreciation of each other's guts and cockiness is part of the bond between Tony and Rhodey."

– *War Machine* writer Greg Pak

IRON ARM(OR)

War Machine and Invincible Iron Man Up The Armor Quotient During Marvel's Dark Reign

By Chris Arrant

Iron Man is hotter than ever these days, thanks to the recent blockbuster movie and his increasingly integral role in the Marvel Universe. Last year, Marvel debuted a new Iron Man series entitled, appropriately enough, *Invincible Iron Man*. Written by Matt Fraction with art by Salvador Larroca, the series has taken a character fans affectionately refer to as "Ol' Shellhead" to new heights and he's now set to be joined by an old friend – War Machine.

War Machine has been especially central to the Marvel Universe in this post-*Civil War* era, and in December he launched his own self-titled solo series. Behind the War Machine mask is none other than Tony Stark's longtime wingman, Jim "Rhodey" Rhodes, whose ascension from supporting character to his own series began in the final issues of *Iron Man: Director of S.H.I.E.L.D.* when he discovered just how much faith Tony Stark had in him. "Christos Gage and Sean Chen have brought us an awesome tale of Rhodey discovering that his best friend Tony Stark set him up to carry on the fight if Iron Man were ever incapacitated," said *War Machine* writer Greg Pak. "And in the wake of the Skrull invasion, such a disaster comes to pass and Rhodey becomes a one-man army taking on the Skrulls from a stealth satellite orbiting the planet."

The new *War Machine* series aims to reflect real world events and how a super hero would deal with them. (Think less super-villains, but more real-world despots, dictators and terrorists.) Just as in *Invincible Iron Man*, this new *War Machine* series shows a science fiction hero in a globally conscious world. "As the ongoing *War Machine* book begins, Rhodey takes the next step, carrying on the fight against monsters and madmen across the globe whom no other force on Earth seems willing to confront," explained Pak. "Christos brought Rhodey to the edge; I'm lucky enough to be able to launch him off the precipice."

But just who is James "Rhodey" Rhodes, aka War Machine?

"Like so many classic Marvel heroes, Rhodey grew up as an underdog – in his case, bullied on the mean streets of South Philly," said Pak. "But Rhodey didn't stumble onto superpowers by being bitten by a radioactive spider or hit by an isotope falling off the back of a truck. Instead, he joined the Army. Similarly, Tony Stark wasn't given his superpowers – he built them from scratch in the form of his Iron Man armor. So both Tony and Rhodey started their careers not as innocent youths unexpectedly receiving great powers and great responsibilities, but as grown men who with clear, hard eyes reached out for the power to defend themselves and the people and country they loved. That requires a certain level of confidence – even arrogance. And no doubt an appreciation of each other's guts and cockiness is part of the bond between Tony and Rhodey."

Although they share some similarities, don't think they're the same. "A key difference between the two men is that Rhodey at his core remains a soldier, which means he has a very different understanding of the use of violence than the average Marvel hero," Park explained. "That will be one of the key themes we'll explore in the pages of the *War Machine* ongoing; it's one of the reasons only War Machine is willing to take on the insane responsibilities he assumes during the course of our story."

While a new era for War Machine kicks off in his new series, Iron Man's struggles continue in Fraction's *Invincible Iron Man*. "Things get worse. Things get very bad," Fraction says

SPIDEY AND STARK RE[illegible]ION

The first team-up since *Civil War/One More Day* between Spider-Man and Iron Man occurred in the instant classic *Invincible Iron Man #7*. (Art by Salvador Larroca.)

succinctly. "The next storyline is called 'World's Most Wanted.' With S.H.I.E.L.D. being taken over by Norman Osborn, Norman has manipulated things so Tony Stark is treated like a war criminal. So it's a very bad time to be Tony.

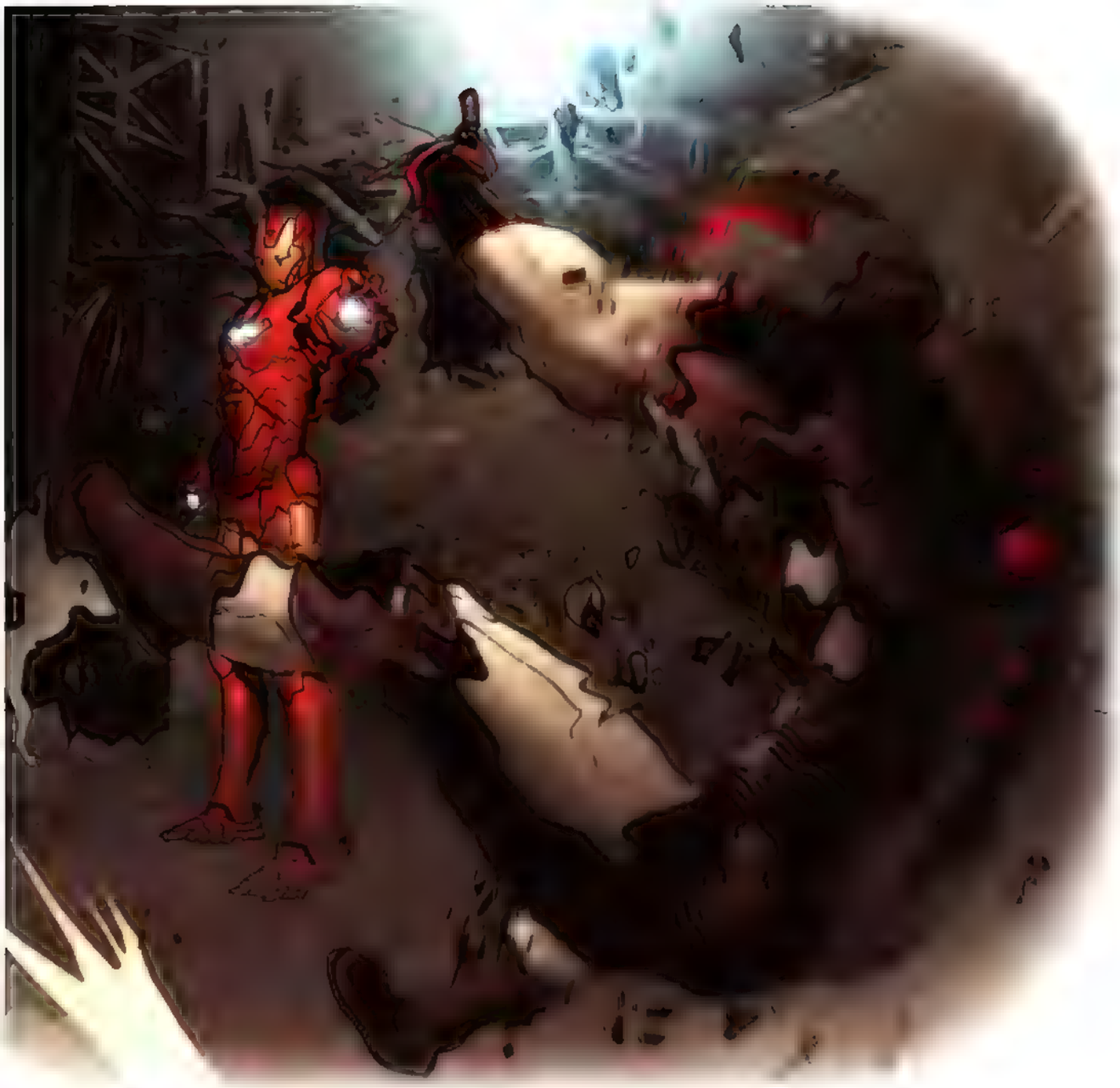
"And the crux of this chase for Tony is about the location of the super-hero database that contains everyone's names and identities in it," said the *Invincible Iron Man* scribe. "Norman wants his hands on that, and Tony has it."

As Tony turns from America's top cop to America's Most Wanted, it means there are a lot of people out there looking for him. With a recent appearance by Spider-Man in *Invincible Iron Man #7*, are we going to see more familiar faces with the Armored Avenger? Fraction says so. "With Tony becoming the most wanted man in the Marvel universe, all kinds of people come out of the woodwork: old favorites, new villains and old villains alike."

Tony Stark and Jim Rhodes share an intense trust and bond, and that's hard to come by for Tony Stark. Stark has been protective – rightfully so – of the power that the Iron Man technology possesses, yet he trusts Rhodey to his own Iron Man suit of armor, letting him wear it from time to time. "There's just about nobody Iron Man's known longer than Rhodey," explained Pak, "If I recall correctly, Rhodey was the very first

WAR MACHINE AT WAR:
Rhodey takes on the Skrulls in *Iron Man #33* (Art by Sean Chen.)

A SOLDIER READY FOR WAR: Rhodey's arsenal is on full display as War Machine. (Art from *Iron Man #33* by Sean Chen.)



IRON MAN ILLUSTRATOR: Sal Larroca has been pulling out all the stops as artist of *Invincible Iron Man*, including this thrilling battle scene with Ezekiel Stane. (Art from *IIM #6*.)

person Tony Stark met after escaping from the bad guys in his very first suit of Iron Man armor. They teamed up and fought side by side, laying the groundwork for a friendship that would survive years of battle, multiple tragedies, and one or two terrible misunderstandings. Tony and Jim know each other through and through, fully appreciating each others' strength's and weaknesses. It's telling that Rhodey's one of the few other people to wear Tony's Iron Man armor, and Tony's one of the few other people to wear Rhodey's War Machine armor."

And although Tony's awfully busy in the pages of his own series as well as the *Avengers*, he's not the type of friend to miss out on Rhodes' new mission.

"You'll see Tony Stark play a big role in *War Machine #1*," said Pak. "But for fear of spoilers for both books, I'll say no more about what comes next."

In the aftermath of *Civil War* and the foundation of the 50 States Initiative, Jim Rhodes found himself a vital part of the Marvel Universe with important roles to play in *Avengers: The Initiative* and the *Iron Man* series. But the stress of new responsibilities has seemingly taken a toll on Rhodey: In a recent issue of *Avengers: The Initiative*, Rhodes was revealed to be a cyborg – with some of his human parts replaced with bionic attachments. "We'll soon delve deep into the conflicts between man and machine, between heart and hardware," said Pak. "What the heck am I talking about? All will be revealed (or will begin to be revealed, anyway!) in the pages of *War Machine #1*!"

Although War Machine's suit bears some similarities to the Iron Man armor and both were made by Stark, they're distinctly different pieces of technologies. "Rhodey's giant, shoulder-mounted rocket launchers point to a fundamental difference between the War Machine and Iron Man suits," explained *War Machine* writer Greg Pak. "The Iron Man suit is sleek and flexible enough to perform beautifully in a wide variety of circumstances – doing everything from fighting super-villains to serving as a bodyguard to managing high tech operations to making public appearances at the United Nations, the Blue Area of the Moon,

or the local kindergarten. In contrast, War Machine seems to be designed for one primary purpose – providing overwhelming force in the field of battle."

"In short, the Iron Man armor was built for a super hero. The War Machine armor was built for a soldier. "

War Machine's return to his own title has been several years in the making, with bigger roles in the post-*Civil War* Marvel Universe… but it was a movie that put it over the edge. "I'd be willing to hazard a guess that the insane success of the *Iron Man* movie primed the pump," explained Pak.

Part of the success of Iron Man in comics has been that influence of the movie. In *Invincible Iron Man*, Fraction took cues from the movie and interweaved them with the current Marvel continuity to form a thoroughly modern and intelligent take on the sci-fi super hero. And from the sales the series has shown, the fans enjoy it. So does Hollywood apparently, as Fraction was recently flown out to Los Angeles to work for a week with *Iron Man* director Jon Favreau to plan out the next movie.

In the past, Fraction has described Iron Man as "science fiction in super hero clothes," and readers of the series can see that in the pages. "I think Iron Man works best when he's treated more as a science fiction concept rather than a super hero one. He's a guy in a suit he made, and he thinks like a futurist. That's interesting to me. In the first storyline I came at it from a science fiction bent, in a world not so terribly removed from the world of tomorrow. This is about the nightmare of tomorrow rather than the traditional 'Muahahahaahhahha'."

Muahahahaahahahha indeed!

INVINCIBLE IRON MAN #8 *and* WAR MACHINE #1 *kick off Dark Reign in December '08!* ●

WAR MACHINE IN COLLECTED EDITIONS

The saga of Col. Jim "Rhodey" Rhodes and his armored alter ego War Machine may have begun in the pages of Iron Man, but he's had key roles in several outstanding series since his creation.

SECRET WARS OMNIBUS HC
Collects *Secret Wars #1-12* and more!
By Jim Shooter and Mike Zeck

Subbing for Iron Man while Tony Stark muddled through the trials of alcoholism, Rhodey was part of the group of heroes summoned by the Beyonder to Battleworld!

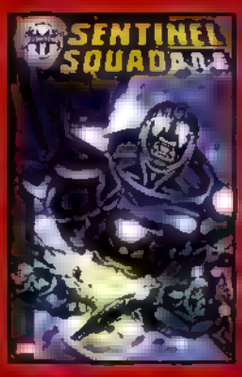
AVENGERS: THE INITIATIVE VOL. 1: BASIC TRAINING HC/TPB
Collects *Avengers: The Initiative #1-6*
By Dan Slott, Stefano Caselli and Steve Uy

IRON MAN: WAR MACHINE TPB
Collects *Iron Man #280-291*
By Len Kaminski, Kevin Hopgood, Tom Morgan and others

Jim Rhodes dons the War Machine armor for the first time. Guest-starring the West Coast Avengers!

AVENGERS: THE INITIATIVE VOL. 2: KILLED IN ACTION HC/TPB
Collects *Avengers: The Initiative #7-13* and *Annual #1*
By Dan Slott, Christos Gage, Stefano Caselli, Steve Uy and others

Avengers veterans War Machine, Justice and Yellowjacket train the next generation of heroes.



SENTINEL SQUAD O*N*E TPB
Collects *Sentinel Squad ONE #1-5*
By John Layman and Aaron Lopresti

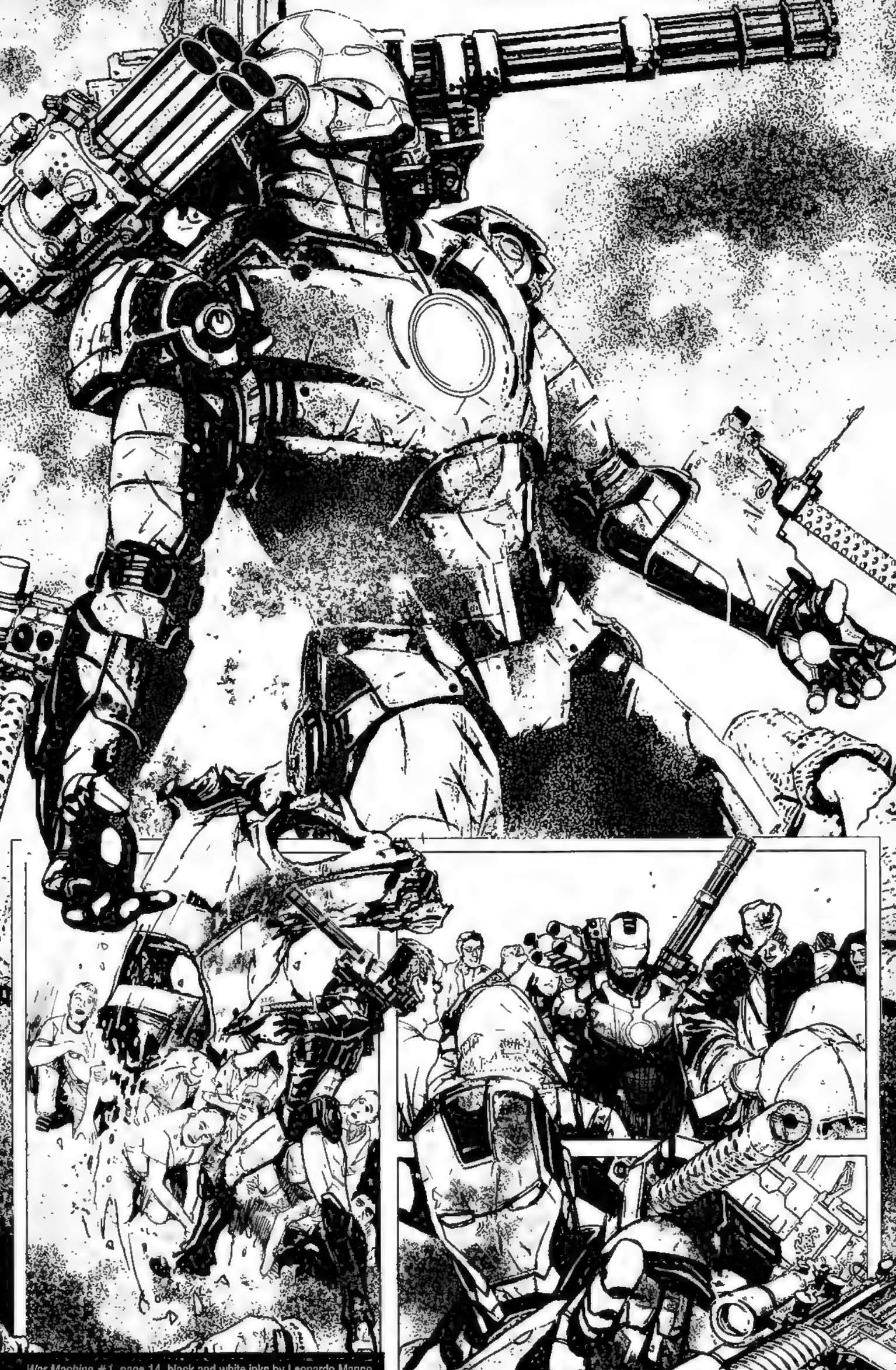
The Sentinels are assembled into an elite force to…guard and protect mutankind? Jim Rhodes is tasked with leading the force that will protect the 198 in the aftermath of the mutant decimation.

SECRET INVASION: WAR MACHINE TPB
Collects *Iron Man: Director of S.H.I.E.L.D. #33-35* plus *Iron Man #144*
By Christos Gage, Sean Chen, Bob Layton and David Michelinie

War Machine takes on the Skrull invasion, in an adventure that launches the brand new *War Machine* ongoing series! Plus, the legendary origin of Jim Rhodes, reprinted from *Iron Man #144*!

Marvel Spotlight is proud to preview the amazing black and white linework of *War Machine* artist Leonardo Manco.

War Machine #1, page 5, black and white inks by Leonardo Manco



War Machine #1, page 14, black and white inks by Leonardo Manco

IT'S THE FIFTIES ALL OVER AGAIN!

The Agents Of The Atlas Era Return For Another Round Of Adventure!

By Dugan Trodglen

As high concept comics go, they don't get much higher – or better – than *Agents of Atlas*. In the original limited series from 2006, writer Jeff Parker and artist Leonard Kirk resurrected a band of misfit 1950's heroes originally brought together in *What If...? #9* ("What if the Avengers Formed in the 1950's?"). All of the characters (save retrofitted Roy Thomas creation 3D Man) were bona fide characters from the decade in which Marvel was called (...wait for it...) Atlas Comics. In Parker's story, the team reformed in a wild globetrotting adventure, with Gorilla Man, The Human Robot, Marvel Boy, Venus, and sea princess Namora (replacing 3D Man), all led by secret agent Jimmy Woo to go up against the mysterious, nefarious Atlas Foundation. What they discovered was that its leader, the Golden (né Yellow) Claw, Jimmy's longtime adversary, was actually manipulating events to put Jimmy *in charge* of the organization as his successor! Are you still with me? Good. At the end of the series, Jimmy and his team were indeed placed at the head of the Atlas Foundation, as supposed international criminals who vowed to use Atlas's vast resources to better the world instead of "take it over."

Flash forward to the Marvel Universe, post-*Secret Invasion*. In an ironic mirror to the Agents of Atlas, the world's biggest cop is now the sinister Norman Osborn! Now is the perfect time for Jimmy and the gang to assert themselves and use their villainous front to infiltrate Norman Osborn's Dark Reign. Jeff Parker is back to bring us their adventures in an all-new *Agents of Atlas* ongoing series, joined by *Planet Hulk* artist Carlo Pagulayan. Jeff joined *Spotlight* to talk about the past, present and future of all things Atlas!

"I was starting to give up...and then suddenly Norman Osborn is running things and it was exactly perfect." — Writer Jeff Parker on scheduling the Agents of Atlas sequel

SPOTLIGHT: First of all – in the interest of full disclosure – while I can't really explain it, *What If...#9* was one of my absolute favorite comics back when it came out in 1978.

JEFF: That's what John Siuntres at the wordballoon blog always says. It seemed to stick with a few people.

SPOTLIGHT: So when *Agents of Atlas* was first announced I was shocked and delighted to say the least, and you and Leonard Kirk did not let me down.

JEFF: Oh! Well, thank you very much.

SPOTLIGHT: Let's talk about the origins of the revival. How on earth did it come to pass that you would update such an obscure menagerie as the would-be Avengers of the 1950's?

JEFF: Mark Pannicia gets his weird hunches every now and then; a couple a year. I was originally pitching for the *Doc Samson* limited series Marvel did a few years ago and for whatever reason nobody went with my wacky ideas, but that was when Mark thought, "We need to do something that's really out there with Jeff." I don't know what he was looking at in the office, but he came across that issue of *What If...* and he called me. He said, "Did you ever read *What If...#9*?" and he had to remind me what it was. I was like, "Oh yeah, that one! The Secret Avengers!"

He asked if I thought something could be done there and I said, "I don't know, I'll try to think of something." I was dealing with a lot of personal issues and even though I was trying not to focus on comics I couldn't stop thinking of story ideas.

I ended up sitting down and looking at the characters and realized that Don Glut and Roy Thomas kind of got together the icons, the archetypes of pulp sci-fi/fantasy: the Secret Agent, the Robot, the Spaceman, the Ape Man/Jungle hero, the mythical character, all except for 3D Man! If we just took 3D Man out of there, we'd have it! (*Laughter.*)

SPOTLIGHT: Of course, 3D Man was the only character that didn't exist in comics in the 1950's. He was created by Roy in the 70's.

JEFF: The fact that 3D Man wasn't around and the rest of them were actually in Atlas Comics made it easy to lose him. You'd be surprised, by the way, how long it took us to get to the name *Agents of Atlas*. We wanted call it *Secret Avengers* at first, but that ended up getting used within the actual *New Avengers* storyline. It finally occurred to me after about a million different names that we were missing the obvious by not putting Atlas in their name. It's sort of a meta kind of thing by referencing the publisher and creating the Atlas Foundation.

What really got things rolling for me is I went back and found some *Giant Size Master of Kung Fu* issues that had the old Yellow Claw reprints in the back. It occurred to me that Yellow

AGENTS OF ATLAS: Your Atlas Era superheroes, from left: Marvel Boy, M-11, Gorilla Man, S.H.I.E.L.D. liaison Derek Khanata, Jimmy Woo, Namora and Venus. (Art from Agents of *Atlas #6* by Leonard Kirk.)

NAMORA RISING! The super heroine of the sea returns triumphantly to life in *AOA #4*. (Art by Kirk.)

Claw never really tried very hard to kill Jimmy Woo. It's almost like he really doesn't want to kill him. He'll tell a henchman, "Oh, just let him go." (*Laughter.*) I hit on the idea that the Yellow Claw was training Jimmy to be his replacement. In that *What If...* issue he used the really over-the-top plan of kidnapping President Eisenhower. Then I thought, "What if he's trying to be over-the-top?" Maybe he's trying to make Jimmy look heroic and get him placed highly in the government. Generally someone that saves the president like that should be on the fast track to maybe Secretary Of Defense or something. Instead, as we know, Jimmy went on to S.H.I.E.L.D.

But the whole thing revolves around Jimmy, and that's the premise of the series. Jimmy has become the new head of the Atlas Foundation, which is supposed to "take over the world," but they are trying to use its vast resources to do good. Jimmy would love to just be the hero and let people know he's the hero, but he finds he can get more done by playing a bad guy so he keeps it up. While the gorilla, the robot, and Bob Grayson don't really care, it probably bothers Venus and Namora a little bit. They'd rather look honorable, but Namora in particular is going to do anything Jimmy says because he and the team got her out of a block of ice when no one else even remembered she was down there.

SPOTLIGHT: The series was very high concept, and it ended in a spot just ripe for new story ideas, but nothing happened until Dark Reign came along, which seems the perfect compliment to the team's status quo.

JEFF: Yeah. We tried to pitch a return series to Marvel, but they kept saying, "Eh, it doesn't work with what we're doing at the moment." I was starting to give up because I had no control over whatever the Marvel "super story" was and then suddenly Norman Osborn is running things and it was exactly perfect.

SPOTLIGHT: Having them pretend to be "bad guys" fits into Norman's world perfectly.

JEFF: They were hoping to be able to reveal themselves as the good guys but now the way things are it's like, "Yes, we are the Atlas Foundation." That's what will get the team closer to the things they need to change. I like the idea that, at the end of the first series, instead of going and blowing up the Atlas base they end up moving in and becoming part of it to change it. In a way that's more realistic. Even though these guys are some of the more out-there, fantastic characters, in a way they're doing more real-life things.

SPOTLIGHT: Agents of Atlas is far from a normal super team in many respects, including their mission statement. What characterizes a mission or a case for them?

GORILLAS, GUNS and GORT! The Human Robot, M-11, helps Gorilla Man take care of business in *AOA #1*. (Art by Kirk.)

JEFF: Part of inheriting the Atlas Foundation and its resources is that Jimmy's goal is to fix the whole world on every level. They'll see a TV news report that seems "off" and they have M-11 destroy the satellite. They chase down an internet scam. Everything is the same size to them, whether a tidal wave or a little crooked operation going on down an alley. They do whatever presents itself to them, which is lots of things.

They still have to clean up their own act as well. The Atlas Foundation itself is not completely under control and they always have problems with their own people.

SPOTLIGHT: Even though Jimmy is more or less the new head of the Atlas Foundation, overseeing even him is the ancient dragon, Mr. Lao.

JEFF: Ah yes, Mr. Lao.

SPOTLIGHT: How does he view the team's mission and their good guy/bad guy dichotomy?

JEFF: He knows Jimmy wants to try to do good. But as we present them, dragons are the master manipulators of the world. He'll say, "Yeah, you're gonna do a lot of good…and take over the world." He wants the organization back on the track it was on. Its lineage goes back to Genghis Khan and Mr. Lao is the royal advisor. You'll be meeting another dragon later in the series and see that they are part of a bigger chess game.

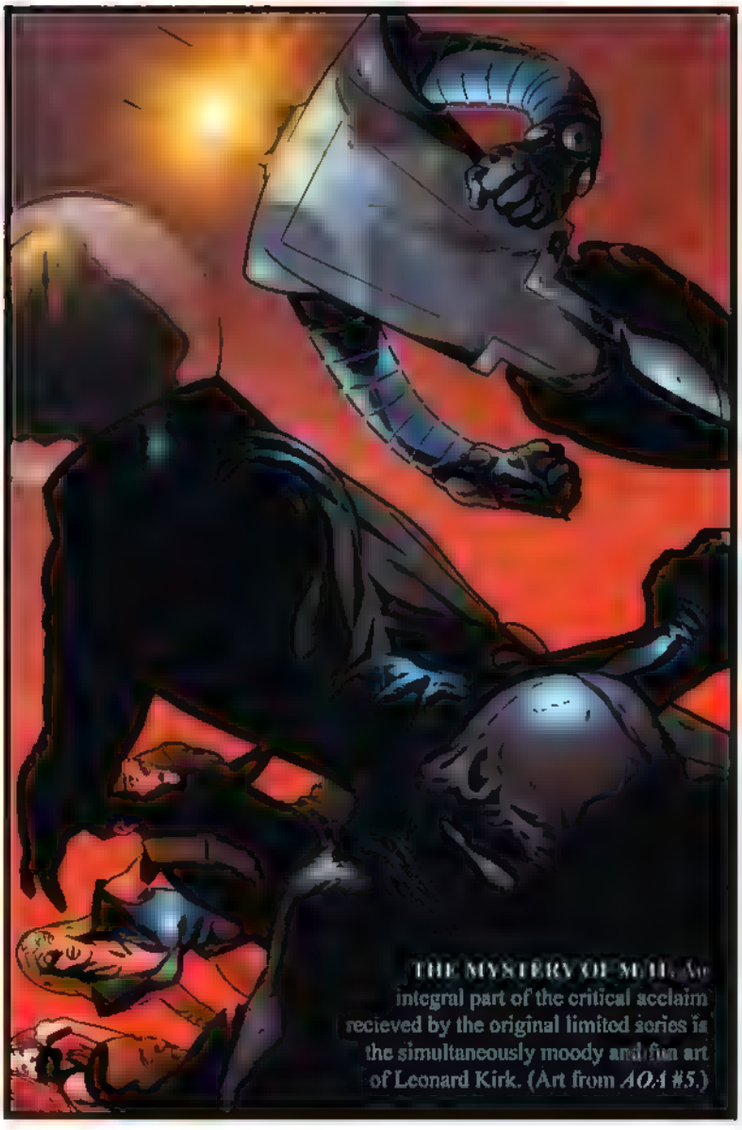
And yes, his name owes a debt to *The Circus Of Dr. Lao*, a terrific book. If anyone can find a copy, I recommend it.

SPOTLIGHT: I suppose whatever Jimmy's plans are, Norman Osborn's ascent fits Lao's agenda well.

JEFF: Oh, sure. He's happy with it. As far as Mr. Lao is concerned, on paper they are doing what they're supposed to be doing. He's also going to complicate things some more by invoking a thing he can do in his position by introducing a second who can come in and be Jimmy Woo's understudy. As Mr. Lao presents it, because Jimmy is putting himself right out there in the action he could be killed at any time. So Lao brings in another worthy candidate to replace him if necessary. So they have sort of a spy who will be tagging along with them that – surprise – no one's going to like. We'll learn who at the end of the first issue.

SPOTLIGHT: The Agents of Atlas strike me as a team that it's hard to get one over on. They seem very confident. Do you think they see themselves as always two steps ahead of whomever they are dealing with?

JEFF: They're certainly trying. I like to think that they plan harder than other teams and that's what makes the difference for them. On the surface they're not as powerful as, say, the Avengers, but they have an old FBI-style background. They actually sit down and work out plans before they do anything; they don't just show up assuming they're going to be able to win a fight. If they do show up and look like they're itching for a fight, that's almost certainly not what they're really there for.


THE MYSTERY OF M.O.D.O.K. An integral part of the critical acclaim recieved by the original limited series is the simultaneously moody and fun art of Leonard Kirk. (Art from AOA #5.)

But I'm not writing this like everyone who goes against Agents of Atlas gets their butts kicked because it's their book. They do have their plans derailed from time to time.

SPOTLIGHT: Are the Agents of Atlas going to be running into some familiar (or obscure) faces in the Marvel Universe?

JEFF: They'll be running into some heavy hitters. It'll be the classic misunderstanding brawl that never gets resolved because the Agents are still supposed to look crooked. And I love using the obscure characters so you never know what'll happen there.

SPOTLIGHT: They have to meet the new 3D Man.

JEFF: That's too good to pass up. They'll have to have some sort of confusing meeting.

Sounds great to us! Check out AGENTS OF ATLAS *in early 2009!* ●

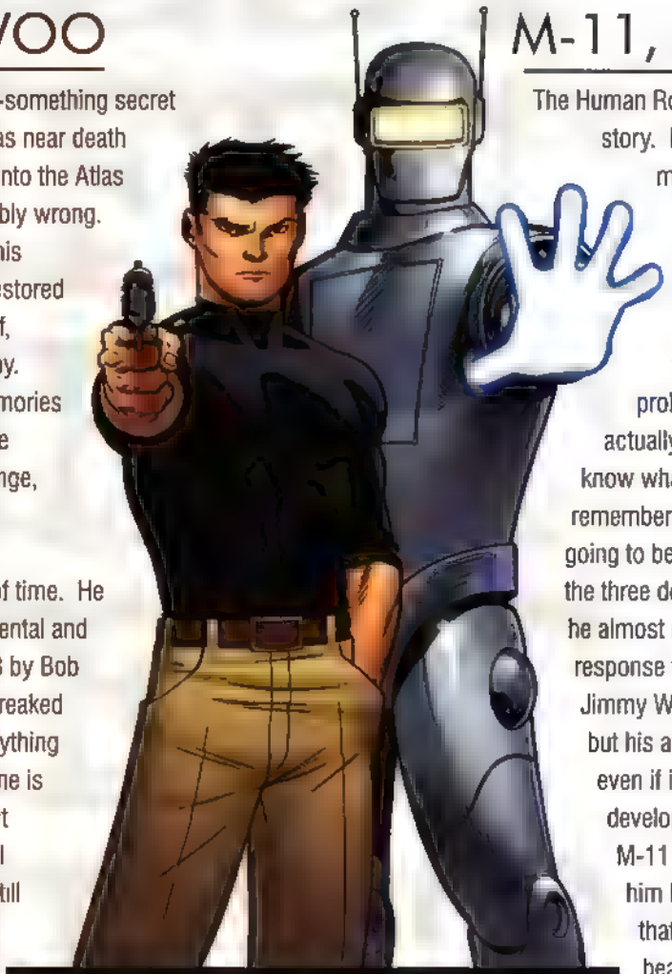
MEET THE

Since the Atlas Era super-team are an obscure lot of heroes from the most obscure era of Marvel history, you may want a formal introduction to them! Here's your handy guide to what makes them tick, courtesy of writer Jeff Parker. Put them all together and you have Agents of Atlas, the wildest team in all of Marvel!

JIMMY WOO

The team's leader, 70-something secret agent Jimmy Woo, was near death after an investigation into the Atlas Foundation went horribly wrong. After being saved by his teammates, he was restored to his young 1958 self, courtesy of Marvel Boy. Unfortunately, his memories match his body and he finds himself in a strange, futuristic world.

"He's still a man out of time. He was restored to his mental and physical state of 1958 by Bob Grayson so he's still freaked out at how much everything costs and that everyone is using cell phones. But he's adapting. It's still the Marvel Universe-still a weird place." – Jeff Parker



Variant cover to AOA (2009) #5 by Ed McGuinness

M-11, aka HUMAN ROBOT

The Human Robot debuted in a fairly standard "robot gone mad" story. He remains the hardest nut to crack of all the members, probably because he almost never speaks.

"We added the designation M-11 because he originally appeared in *Menace #11*. You have to wonder: 'Human Robot?' Did Stan just forget the term 'android?'" (*Laughter.*) Like Ken, you're probably not gonna get a good hug from him. He's actually my favorite character because you just never know what he's thinking. But he is thinking something. I remember early on I was trying to figure out what he was going to be like. Am I going to give him this robot voice with the three dots between each word? Then I thought, 'Maybe he almost never says anything and you can't guarantee a response from him.' Then he just took off in my head. For Jimmy Woo, he realizes you don't know what he's thinking but his actions speak loudest and he always comes through, even if it doesn't make sense at first. We have a neat plot development coming up that comes out of something M-11 does that doesn't make sense to anyone around him but will make sense to the reader based on things that are going on around him. You'll be more in his head than the team is."

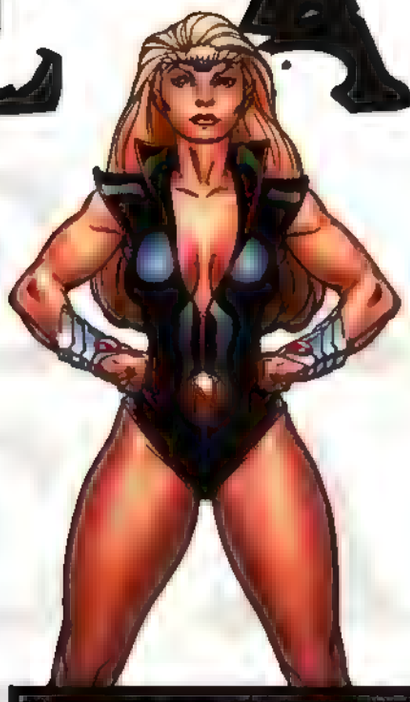
MARVEL BOY, aka BOB GRAYSON/THE URANIAN

Bob is the most transformed of the team. In the 1950's he was a wide-eyed young adventurer from Uranus. Now he is an aloof, detached alien after several decades living *inside* the planet of Uranus.

"We refer to him more and more as 'The Uranian' in the series. It's also a strange experience for him. He was this young kid flying around having a blast in the '50s when he came to Earth, but he's spent the last fifty years living in a mucus membrane on the seventh planet with these strange aliens he identifies with more now. So even though he looks human, a lot of his responses are as weird or hard to interpret as the robot's. We're going to get into his detachment and the trouble he's having relating to earth life.

Art from AOA (2006) #3 by Leonard Kirk.

E AGENTS

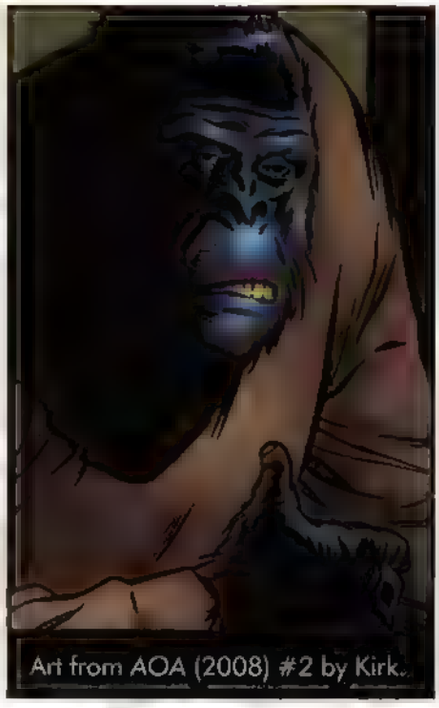


Variant cover to AOA (2009) #2 by McGuinness

NAMORA

Cousin to Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner, Namora was invited to join the original team, but declined. Years later she was apparently killed, but was actually in a coma-like state at the bottom of the ocean for decades until being rescued by Jimmy and company.

"Another thing we're going to pick up on in the series is her daughter dying. Namorita and her New Warriors teammates dying was the big thing that kicked off *Civil War*. Namora's been thrust into this odd situation where she's happy to have been essentially brought back to life, but just in time to learn that her daughter was killed only a month before. We haven't seen her deal with it; all we've seen is her having fun with Hercules over in his book [*The incredibly incredible* INCREDIBLE HERCULES. *Don't ask, just buy! – Ed.*] It's actually profoundly affected her and by issue #2 you really start to get a sense of that.

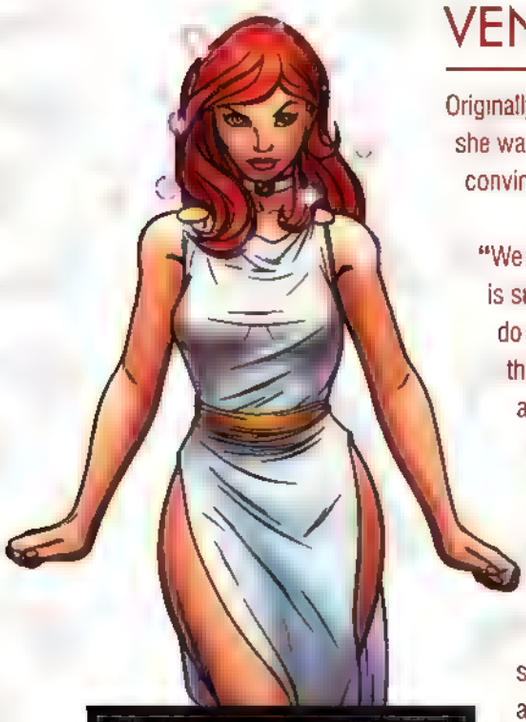


Art from AOA (2008) #2 by Kirk.

GORILLA MAN

One of those wacky jungle curses resulted in adventurer Ken Hale being transformed into, well, a gorilla man. You might say he is the most angst-free member of the group.

"Gorilla Man? He's a gorilla. (*Laughter.*) I just love his real name. That's why we almost never call him Gorilla Man; we just call him Ken all the time. Usually when you go back and look at these old throwaway stories to draw characters from, they usually also have throwaway names. You even get confused: 'Why did they have to call him Bob *Grayson*?' (*Laughter.*) That cool name is part of what pushed me to make his background to be more of a soldier of fortune. I also wanted to explain why he seems to be so good with all the weaponry and fighting. Simply becoming a gorilla is not enough of an explanation. This is all working out fairly well for him. He's just looking for some fun action."



Variant cover to AOA (2009) #4 by McGuinness

VENUS

Originally touted as the actual goddess of love, Jeff gave the character a darker spin by revealing that she was actually an ancient siren who, after being cursed with a soul, suppressed her memory and convinced herself she was the mythical goddess. Now she is aware of her past.

"We tweaked her origin a good bit. It's actually kind of confusing if you read her old comics. She is supposed to be the goddess Venus, but in one she's saying she's *from* Venus. I decided to do something I do from time to time and that's just look at the comics and see if we can explain them. Her origin seemed to constantly change, it was very schizophrenic. She worked for a magazine. Of course: You're a goddess, you're gonna come to Earth and say, 'I wanna get me one of them magazine jobs!' (*Laughter.*) But looking at all that, I wanted something to explain her wacky background that seemed to change all the time. I came up with the idea that she just thinks she's Venus because she's beautiful and can affect everybody with her beauty. So she's actually an old siren. I like the idea that she's the sweetest member of the team but in reality was once the greatest monster of them all. She was literally killing sailors by the hundreds and bringing them down to a sea monster. That sets up nicely the fact that I imagine the actual goddess Venus is going to want to come down and see who's been using her name. A little Venus on Venus conflict I really like writing her because she's so different than other Marvel characters Most female characters you expect to be a little hard edged to hang with the male characters and she is so the opposite of that."

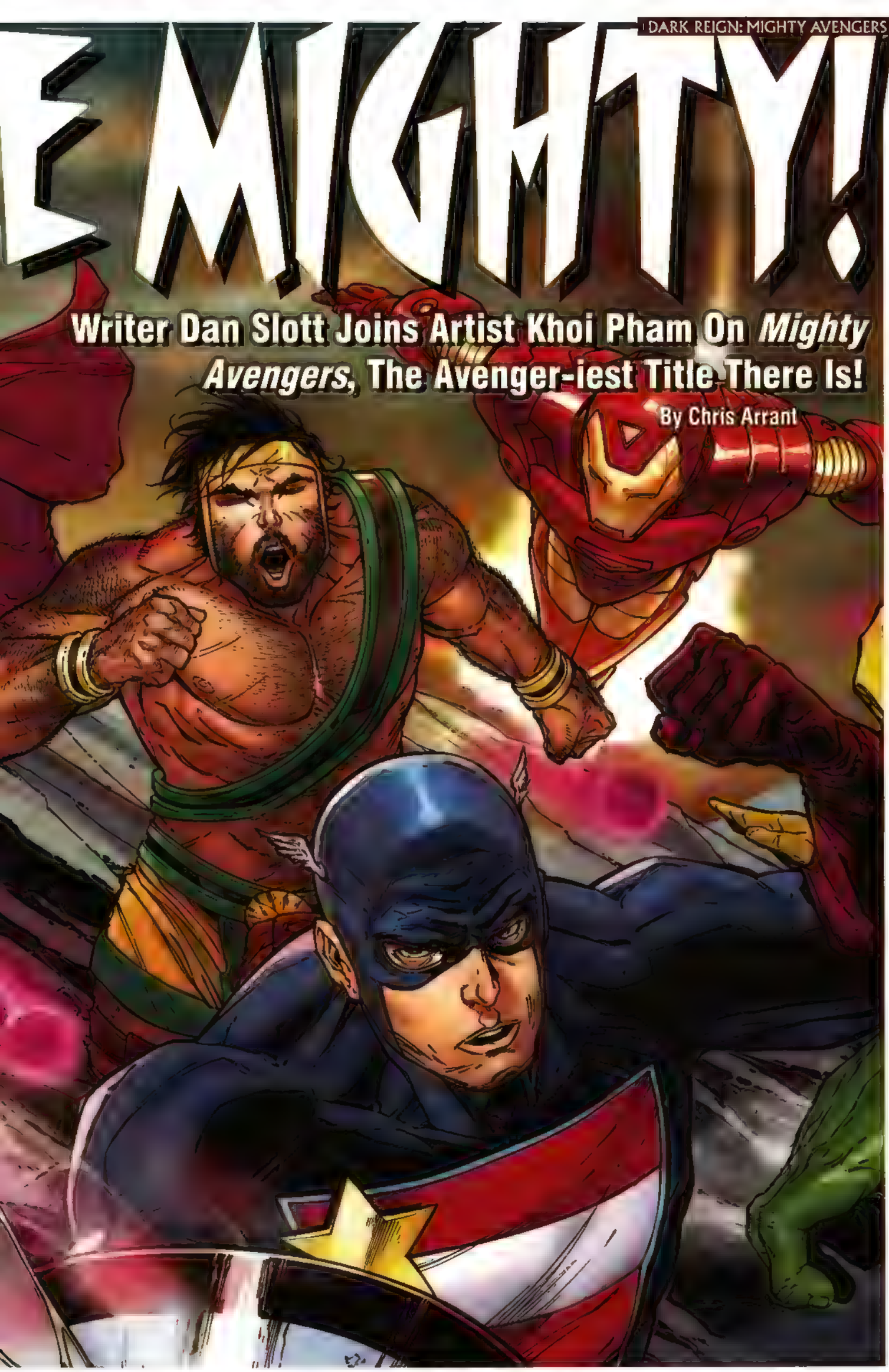
MAKE MINE
"Hank's taking on a new name and costume. He won't be Ant-Man, Giant-Man, Goliath, or Yellowjacket..."
— Writer Dan Slott on Hank Pym's role in Mighty Avengers

COVERING THE MIGHTY AVENGERS: Khoi Pham's cover treatments for *Mighty Avengers #21* and *22* show off his designs of Jocasta, Scarlet Witch.

E MIGHTY!

Writer Dan Slott Joins Artist Khoi Pham On *Mighty Avengers*, The Avenger-iest Title There Is!

By Chris Arrant



USAgent, Iron Man, Hercules, and other Avengers. Who is in the team and who is not? Gotta read the series, bunky!

The Avengers are known as the flagship team of the Marvel Universe, and although there are four Avengers titles in 2009, none can claim to be more "Avengery" than *Mighty Avengers*. So says new writer Dan Slott (*Amazing Spider-Man, Avengers: The Initiative*).

This January, Dan Slott takes the writing reins from series founder Brian Michael Bendis and joins artist Khoi Pham (*Incredible Hercules*) with *Mighty Avengers #21*. He's coming in at an opportune moment: *Secret Invasion* has just ended, the kidnapped heroes have returned, but the villains are taking over with *Dark Reign*. In this new era of the Marvel Universe, Slott is taking the Avengers back to their roots with classic members in this modern world.

Although news on the *Mighty Avengers* line-up has been nil, the cover to issue #21 boasts Scarlet Witch, Jocasta, USAgent, Hercules and Hank Pym in an all-new costume. Just like you, we have lots of questions. Fortunately, we got to sit down with Dan Slott to provide some clarity, talking about the changes in *Mighty Avengers* and why these characters are on the comic's covers, as well as what's coming up in the *Secret Invasion: Requiem* one-shot and his final issue of *Avengers: The Initiative*.

SPOTLIGHT: We've got a lot of questions that readers want to know as you take over *Mighty Avengers* in this Dark Reign era, so let's get right to it.

After the events of *Secret Invasion #8*, we see that Norman Osborn has pretty much taken Tony Stark's slot in S.H.I.E.L.D. and become the government's go-to man for all things superhero.

DAN: Let me chime in for a second to clarify something. Norman doesn't quite have everything that Tony Stark had. S.H.I.E.L.D. is no more, and Norman has the new H.A.M.M.E.R. organization as set-up by the American president in *Secret Invasion #8*. A big glaring difference there is that H.A.M.M.E.R. is an American organization, where S.H.I.E.L.D. was an international one. Norman's scope does not extend to the rest of the world. What you'll see with *Mighty Avengers* is that America isn't planet Earth, and there are a lot of things going on outside American borders.

SPOTLIGHT: *Mighty Avengers* International, so to speak. Are they calling themselves the Avengers?

DAN: Yes, and Norman isn't happy about that. Norman has his own team of Avengers, so there's some conflict there already.

SPOTLIGHT: So as Norman has kicked off this "Dark Reign" era of the Marvel U, how would you say *Mighty Avengers* fits into the Marvel U in 2009?

DAN: One of the things we're trying to do with *Mighty Avengers* is to embrace the legacy of the Avengers. When you look at what happened with *Avengers: Disassembled*, it cleared the way for an all-new Avengers team with characters who haven't traditionally been Avengers, like Spider-Man and Wolverine. When Brian Michael Bendis and Frank Cho did *Mighty Avengers* it was kind of "Avengers: Reassembled," with the team being a continuation of the original legacy, with Iron Man, Wasp, Wonder Man and Black Widow. *Mighty Avengers*, for lack of a better term, had classic cred.

Khoi Pham and I are gonna try to continue what Bendis and Cho started, and be the "Avenger-iest" Avenger book out there.

"...with Mighty Avengers we're sticking with all heavy-hitters. No offense, but do not expect Squirrel Girl or Red Wolf or Woodgod to show up." – Slott

SPOTLIGHT: So… can you tell us who's going to be in your first issue?

DAN: Most of our team is made up of characters who appeared in the first fifty issues of *Avengers*, but I can't be specific of what the final line-up will look like without spoiling things.

SPOTLIGHT: So… nothing? Come on Dan, we're friends here… the fans want to know

DAN: Okay, since the solicitations for *Mighty Avengers #21* is out, I'll say this. That issue will feature a big adventure with Hank Pym, Jocasta, Scarlet Witch, the Hulk, Iron Man, USAgent, Hercules and even Young Avengers members Vision and Stature.

SPOTLIGHT: I knew we could get it out of you. Who's leading the team then, Dan?

DAN: "Who Leads?" is actually the first big story; you'll see a couple characters vying for the leadership role.

SPOTLIGHT: I notice Hank Pym is front and center in *Mighty Avengers #21* cover.

DAN: Yes, Hank Pym is a big part of this, and my goal with *Mighty Avengers* is to move Hank up to the A-List. He's a founding Avengers, but probably the most overlooked. After what we've got in store for him, that's gonna change!

SPOTLIGHT: Hank's had many code-names over the years – but from the cover he's got a new persona. What do we call him?

DAN: Well, I don't want to spoil it for those who haven't read *Secret Invasion: Requiem* yet, but Hank's taking on a new name and costume. He won't be Ant-Man, Giant-Man, Goliath, or Yellowjacket –

SPOTLIGHT: Not Ronin? (*Laughter.*)

DAN: (*Laughter.*) No, I think Hawkeye's sticking with that one for a while. Hank's going to carve out a new legacy and turn the page on his new life.

SPOTLIGHT: Hank's got a lot to get past. The Skrull doppelganger of him was one of the most infamous members of the Skrull Secret Invasion. Now that the real Hank is back, how does he live that down?

DAN: That's right; it's not so much that Hank was replaced, or that he was the face of the Skrull invasion, it's that he's had a big chunk of missing time. And what scares him most about that is all these scary, big events happened while he was out. *House of M*, the problem with the mutants, *World War Hulk*, and *Civil*

"ACCEPTABLE LOSSES": Dan Slott's final issue of *Avengers: The Initiative*, the title he helped found, carries a poignant cover featuring Yellowjacket and the late Wasp. (Cover to *Avengers: The Initiative #20* by Mark Brooks.)

War (where two of his best friends, Captain America and Bill Foster died). He sees what happened under Tony Stark's watch as head of S.H.I.E.L.D., and he can't help but think how he would have done things differently and avoided the current state of things.

He feels like, "If I was here, I might have been able to stop it. Maybe it's time I stepped in and looked after the world. I sure know I can do better than the guys who got us here."

SPOTLIGHT: I can almost hear Hank Pym in your words, Dan. But enough about heroes. Let's talk villains. This wouldn't be super-hero comics if there weren't villains out there. Can you give us an idea of who we can expect to see in the coming months?

DAN: In *New Avengers* and *Mighty Avengers*, we've seen the Avengers franchise go after Doom, the Venom Bomb, Mole Man and the Hand's ninja forces. Khoi and I are going to go back to the mainstream Avengers rogue's gallery. We're going to use the *BIG* Avengers villains. Right off the bat, the team is going to go up against one of their most powerful adversaries; and soon after, they'll go head-to-head against one of Marvel's top super-hero teams.

SPOTLIGHT: There's a lot of classic stories and villains in the *Avengers* pantheon to go around, Dan. What would you say is your favorite era?

DAN: Everyone's got one. On top of the classic Stan Lee & Jack Kirby run, I really like the *Avengers* books by Roger Stern, David Michelinie, John Byrne and George Perez.

SPOTLIGHT: There are four *Avengers* books out there now, so what does the team in *Mighty Avengers* call themselves?

DAN: They call themselves the Avengers. From their point-of-view, they're the real deal.

SPOTLIGHT: The original iteration of *Mighty Avengers* was as the official team for New York State in the 50 State Initiative. Is this still their stomping ground?

THE ART OF KHOI PHAM: Newly arrived to the comics scene, Khoi Pham is ready for the big leagues. He's been *Mighty Avengers* artist since this scintillating scene depicting Elektra's abduction. (Art from *MA #16*.)

DAN: No, with what's gone on in the post-*Secret Invasion* landscape they've decided to take care of the rest of the world.

SPOTLIGHT: The U.S. has a boon of super-heroes, so might as well spread the wealth around, huh? (*Laughter.*)

DAN: Right. Because of the direction Norman Osborn is taking with H.A.M.M.E.R. in the United States, they decided to go elsewhere. But fans will be surprised how they're choosing which crisis to take care of.

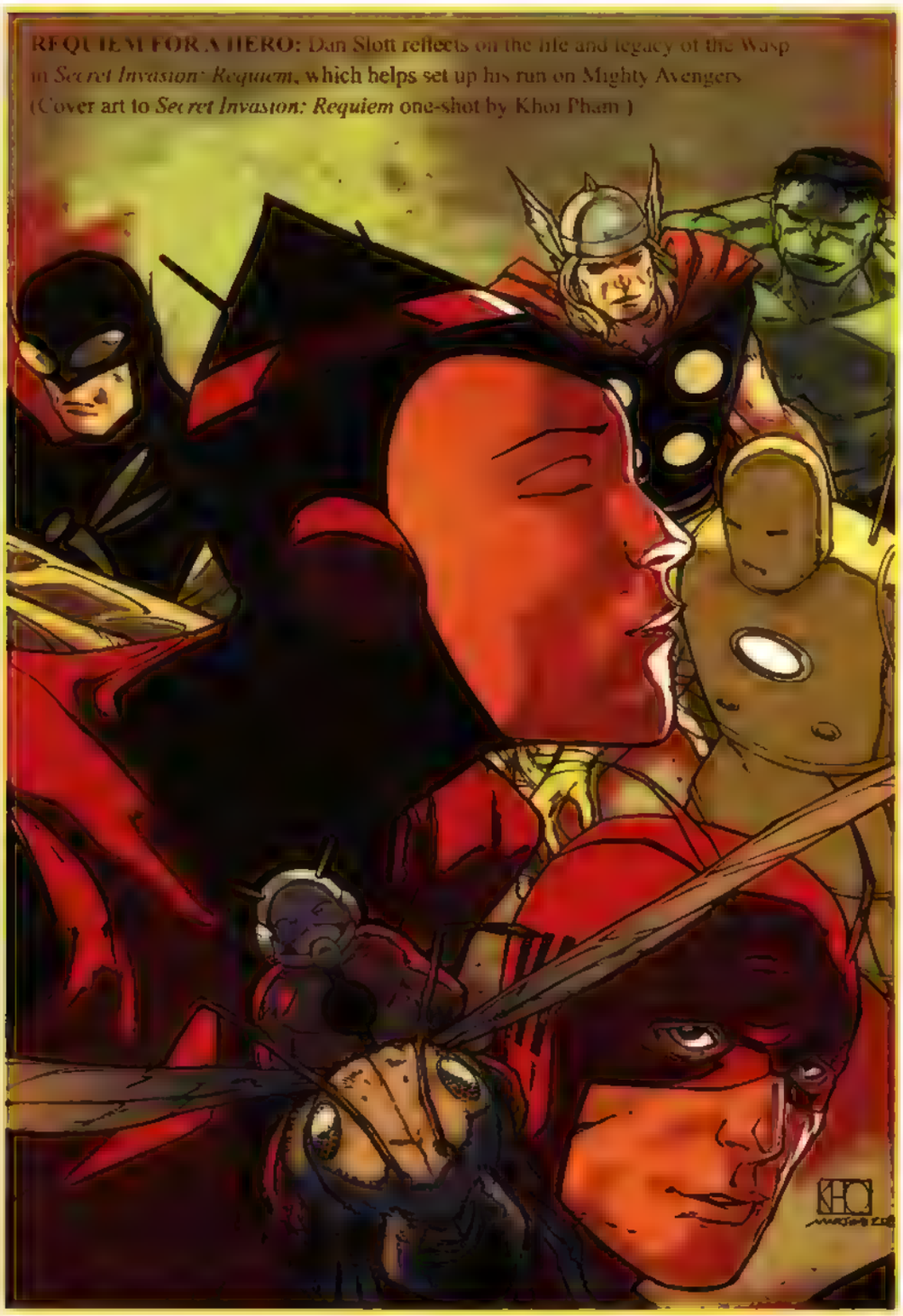
SPOTLIGHT: This sounds like a great story developing, but another interesting story is behind the scenes. Let's talk about your path to this book. You're coming onto a full-fledged *Avengers* title, but you really showed your colors on the *Avengers: The Initiative* and *Amazing Spider-Man*. What's it like coming into this title?

DAN: As a fan, this is awesome because *Mighty Avengers* has all the best toys in the toy box. I grew up being a fan of the super-hero side of the Marvel Universe as opposed to the "X-side" or the cosmic side. When I was working on *Avengers: The Initiative*, a lot of the fun was playing with the C, D, E and H-list characters from the nooks and crannies of the Marvel U.

SPOTLIGHT: 3-D Man. He's great.

DAN: (*Laughter.*) Yeah. But with *Mighty Avengers* we're sticking with all heavy-hitters. No offense, but do not expect Squirrel Girl or Red Wolf or Woodgod to show up. This is like a Hollywood blockbuster, with all the A-list stars.

SPOTLIGHT: When we're talking about the diversity of this book and the classic line-up, I can't help but think of She-Hulk. She's classic Avengers material, and you've been adept at writing her for several years in her solo title. Will we be seeing She-Hulk in *Mighty Avengers*?



REQUIEM FOR A HERO: Dan Slott reflects on the life and legacy of the Wasp in *Secret Invasion: Requiem*, which helps set up his run on Mighty Avengers. (Cover art to *Secret Invasion: Requiem* one-shot by Khoi Pham.)

DAN: Well … maybe. You might even see Spider-Man show up, but my main goal of *Mighty Avengers* is to give the book its own feel. *She-Hulk* was about quirky adventures with Marvel law. *Thing* was a tribute to the Bronze Age *Marvel Two-In-One* books. *Avengers: The Initiative* was looking at the tapestry of the Marvel U post-*Civil War*. But with *Mighty Avengers*, this is looking at the modern-day Avengers legacy and continuing that.

I'm writing the most massive Avenger-y stories I can. With the big guns and major repercussions. We're aiming for epics!

SPOTLIGHT: Before we go, I have to ask one last thing. You've gone from fan to intern to staffer to writer and now one of Marvel's A-List writers. If you could go back in time and tell your teenage Marvel Zombie self something, what would it be?

DAN: I don't think Young Dan Slott would believe me. But as Modern Day Dan, I often find myself saying: "Woo-hoo!"

We're saying WOO HOO too, Dan! Spotlight is a big fan and encourages you to keep cranking out the comics goodness each month in MIGHTY AVENGERS! ●

HAWKEYE & MOCKINGBIRD

THE REUNION

In New Avengers: The Reunion, Writer Jim McCann Helps Two Lost Souls Find Themselves...But At What Cost?

By John Rhett Thomas

Hawkeye and Mockingbird may not have shared the top billing given other star-crossed, tragic Marvel lovers like Daredevil and Elektra or Cyclops and Phoenix, but their fans nonetheless felt the sting of Bobbi Morse's death in *Avengers West Coast #100*, and ever since have watched Clint Barton wander through a lovelorn life knowing that no matter how many women he comes across, none will quite measure up to his late wife. It's a pathos that has defined his character for many years, so the moments when Hawkeye (now suited up in his Ronin garb) regained, then lost, then regained his lost love in a series of confusing, Skrull-filled days provided one of the most startling and emotion-filled moments of *Secret Invasion.*

Now that the Secret Invasion has been quelled, but a Norman Osborn-inspired Dark Reign is upon us, Hawkeye and Mockingbird must pick up the pieces of shattered lives and find out…what? If there is true love to be rekindled? Or if there truly was a lifetime lost while Bobbi was captive to the Skrulls. In addition to his duties in Marvel's marketing department, Jim McCann has been turning in some fresh new work for Marvel as a writer (see *Marvel Westerns: Kid Colt & The Arizona Girl* and *What If? House of M* for two great examples). Reuniting two of Marvel's most legendary lovers would be a plumb assignment for any writer, but for McCann, a Hawkeye/Mockingbird enthusiast since Day 1, it's more than that. It's his own personal reunion with two cherished characters. *Spotlight* checks in with Jim on what we can expect from *New Avengers: The Reunion.*

SPOTLIGHT: Jim, by the time the *Spotlight* faithful have this Dark Reign special in their Marvel lovin' mitts, the *Dark Reign: New Nation* one-shot will be out. Tell us about how that book works with your book, as well as their being part of Bendis' Avengers roster.

JIM: *New Avengers: The Reunion* is a four-issue limited series with a prologue in the *Dark Reign: New Nation* one-shot. They will also be seen in Brian's *New Avengers*, but they're part of an ensemble cast over there, doing Avengery things. In *The Reunion*, that's where you find out how – or if – they'll be able to make their way back together. What the future holds for them as a couple or just as teammates, or even as enemies!

SPOTLIGHT: These two lovers have had such a long history together that stopped short years ago with Mockingbird's shocking death. Since you're scribing their revival, how are you tapping into that feeling they had for each other in the past?

JIM: I absolutely love both of those characters. Hawkeye is my favorite male character of all time. I know people think of me as "the Dazzler guy," and yes, while I do love Dazzler, Mockingbird and Hawkeye were "it" for me as far as a couple. *Avengers West Coast/West Coast Avengers*…I was in it for the long haul, starting back with the first *Hawkeye* limited series. And even though I didn't pick up *Marvel Team-Up #95*, her first appearance, when it first came out, I know that's one of the very first times when I first got into the wonderful realm of longboxes at my local comics shop (where you start rummaging through and going, "Oooh, I want this issue and I want that issue, and I can afford this 25 cent issue!" Her first appearance was one that I picked up and I thought she was such an awesome character.

Oh, and those early appearances will all be collected in March, so people can read about their origins.

SPOTLIGHT: What was it you really liked about their characters?

JIM: These characters are so impulsive, so reckless, and they have such an amazing chemistry. When they first meet, they fight! Fighting from their initial meeting, and then by the end of the series, they'd eloped! (*Laughter.*) From there on, that just defines the two of them. All of their common decisions, it's almost as if they were all made on impulse.

When Mockingbird went through the whole Phantom Rider thing, (after he assaulted her and she found out and let him fall to his death, which led to her massive confrontation with Hawkeye) she became estranged with Hawkeye and left the team. At Marvel, there had not been married couples before who'd been

"…SHE LEARNS FROM (THE SKRULLS) AND REALLY DOES BECOME THIS KIND OF 'MOCKINGBIRD,' AN IMPERSONATOR, A MISTRESS OF DISGUISE THAT COMBINES HER SUPER-HEROIC AND HER SPY NATURE INTO ONE PERSON."

in such a turbulent relationship – I know Reed and Sue had had their issues – but they never let them get as far apart as they let Bobbi and Clint. This was a real, honest to God relationship playing out with some pretty heavy issues being dealt with, and I was fascinated by that. And that's what I wanted to bring back.

SPOTLIGHT: While you note the impulsivity of these characters, which has resonated throughout both of their careers, it makes me think of the rooftop scene you wrote in the eight-page Dark Reign: New Nation preview, where Mockingbird says to Hawkeye, "I need some space." Of course, when most people say they need some space, they just walk out of the room. She jumps off the building! (*Laughter.*) That was a great scene.

JIM: She needed her space, what can I say? (*Laughter.*) And Clint very much does not need any space. He's like, "Give me an answer, now! I wanna know what in the hell is going on!" You'll see in the limited series itself, when it comes out, they are not together in the beginning. It picks up about 48 hours after the prologue. It'll pick up on the promise of that last page where she's made the phone call to a mysterious line…although eagle-eyed readers who know her history will know what the Agent 19 reference is connected with and can start to put some things together.

But one of the really big things that I had to do with this series was to be able to reconcile bringing her back, because, for the readers, she has been gone for fifteen years. It's not bringing back a character just for the sake of bringing back a character. We had to define what sets her apart from other characters in the MU. Who is she? How does she relate to today? What does she mean in today's context? In a lot of ways, she's going to be a fresh set of eyes for people who may be coming back into comics or for people who have just gotten into comics. So much has changed since she's been gone.

But then I also took a look at who this character was: She has a Ph.D. in biology, she was in S.H.I.E.L.D., and for one appearance she was even called "the Huntress." [Check it out in *Marvel Super-Action #1, Ed.]* But at her heart, who she has been has remained the same. She's a very strong-willed, intelligent woman. Not that we don't have those kinds of characters already, but I was challenged with finding what sets her apart. And one of the things I wanted to get to, and you'll see this right away, is I wanted to play with the name Mockingbird and also look at her recent history. She spent the last several years on a Skrull world being held captive on a planet full of shape-shifters who have been observing humanity to prepare for this invasion, so she has picked up some tricks from them. They had their reasons for taking her (which you'll find out) and she learns from them and really does become this kind of "mockingbird," an impersonator, a mistress of disguise that combines her super-heroic and her spy nature into one person. And we don't really have that kind of character in the MU.

The other thing I had to do that I know everyone is saying, *"WHAT?!?!"* about is to properly explain how it is that she is back. After all, we saw "her" "die." (Both those last words in quotes, please!) I know *Avengers West Coast #100* backwards and forwards.

SPOTLIGHT: So there are some things you're pulling from that issue that inspire your explanation?

JIM: As you read in the prologue, Clint says that they buried an empty casket. And people know that when a Skrull that was impersonating someone dies, it would revert back to its Skrull form. If you go back and reread *AWC #100*, she's in Clint's arms after being hit by Mephisto, and she's giving her dying breath, Clint is clutching her closely, and in the next scene, he's standing at the graveside. So there's missing time there that I get to play with and fill in. Clint alludes to that in the prologue, so you'll find a little bit more about that after reading it.

As to when she got replaced, I was going through back issues of *WCA* and a moment hit me. I was reading it, and it hit me. There is a moment there between two issues; there's one appearance and then the next appearance, it's almost like she's a completely different person. I don't want to spoil that because it will all be revealed in the limited series. But it was right there! It was like fifteen years ago they knew, "There you go. If you ever wanted to say she was replaced by a Skrull, here's your moment." (Laughter.) That was really fun for me.

SPOTLIGHT: So that will all be answered, huh?

"We needed someone who can nail expressions really well, do really good fight scenes, and I think Lopez does the most gorgeous Bobbi ever."

— McCann on *Reunion* artist David Lopez.

JIM: Yeah, I'm taking it all on.

SPOTLIGHT: Mockingbird is in a different category of other Skrull replacements. Elektra, Spider-Woman, Dum Dum Dugan, Sue Storm…they were all replaced in a period of weeks or months before the time of the invasion. But Bobbi, as far as we know, last time we saw her was back in *WCA*, which was a *long* time ago. So you're going to resolve all that?

JIM: Oh, yeah. I'm addressing it all. Now, it's not entirely the focus of the series. There's a fine line that I needed to walk, as I had to make this for today's story. It has to be available to people who haven't read every appearance of Mockingbird or Hawkeye. I had to move the story forward but it will be revealed and all will be answered. And I hope to everybody's satisfaction! I know where it all is in my head and if it doesn't make it all out onto the paper, find me at the convention and I'll tell you everything! (*Laughter.*)

SPOTLIGHT: Who else is collaborating?

JIM: David Lopez, who did *Catwoman* before coming on to Marvel. The book's editor, Jeanine Schaefer, and I were looking for somebody who could really handle expression well, but also deliver action. I pointed out in a meeting once that what makes Clint and Bobbi cool is that they are the *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* of the Marvel Universe. You look at that movie, and there is a couple that is very impetuous, very reckless, keeping a lot from each other, and

LOVERS AND FIGHTERS: Erstwhile lovers Clint Barton and Bobbi Morse have a history of both scrapping and smooching, the "Mr. & Mrs. Smith" of the Marvel set. (Art from *Dark Reign: New Nation* one-shot by David Lopez.)

that's what our characters are! We knew this was going to be a high-octane adventure, but there is just as much emotion. As you see in the prologue, they have a tendency to work out their feelings while they're fighting. (*Laughter.*) We needed someone who can nail expressions really well, do really good fight scenes, and I think Lopez does the most gorgeous Bobbi ever.

SPOTLIGHT: Is this his first work at Marvel?

JIM: He did a *What If?* issue a few years ago, but he's been at DC for a while, and I am beyond thrilled that he's here with us now. He's doing some great work for us, some amazing work. He seems to be having a great time, too! We're also updating Bobbi's look. I know that will be controversial. The scene at the end of the prologue, where she has her costume on her bed, that's kind of her farewell to her old self. Clint is left holding her mask. It was very symbolic.

Her new look plays off her old look, but it's updated. It has the slightly flared sleeves, the battle staves, but it's a little sleeker and easier for somebody who is going to be part super hero, part super spy, as opposed to someone who is going to be walking around in a one-piece bathing suit with sleeves. (*Laughter.*) Which is kinda what she had before.

SPOTLIGHT: It sounds like you have a real personal investment in these characters and this series.

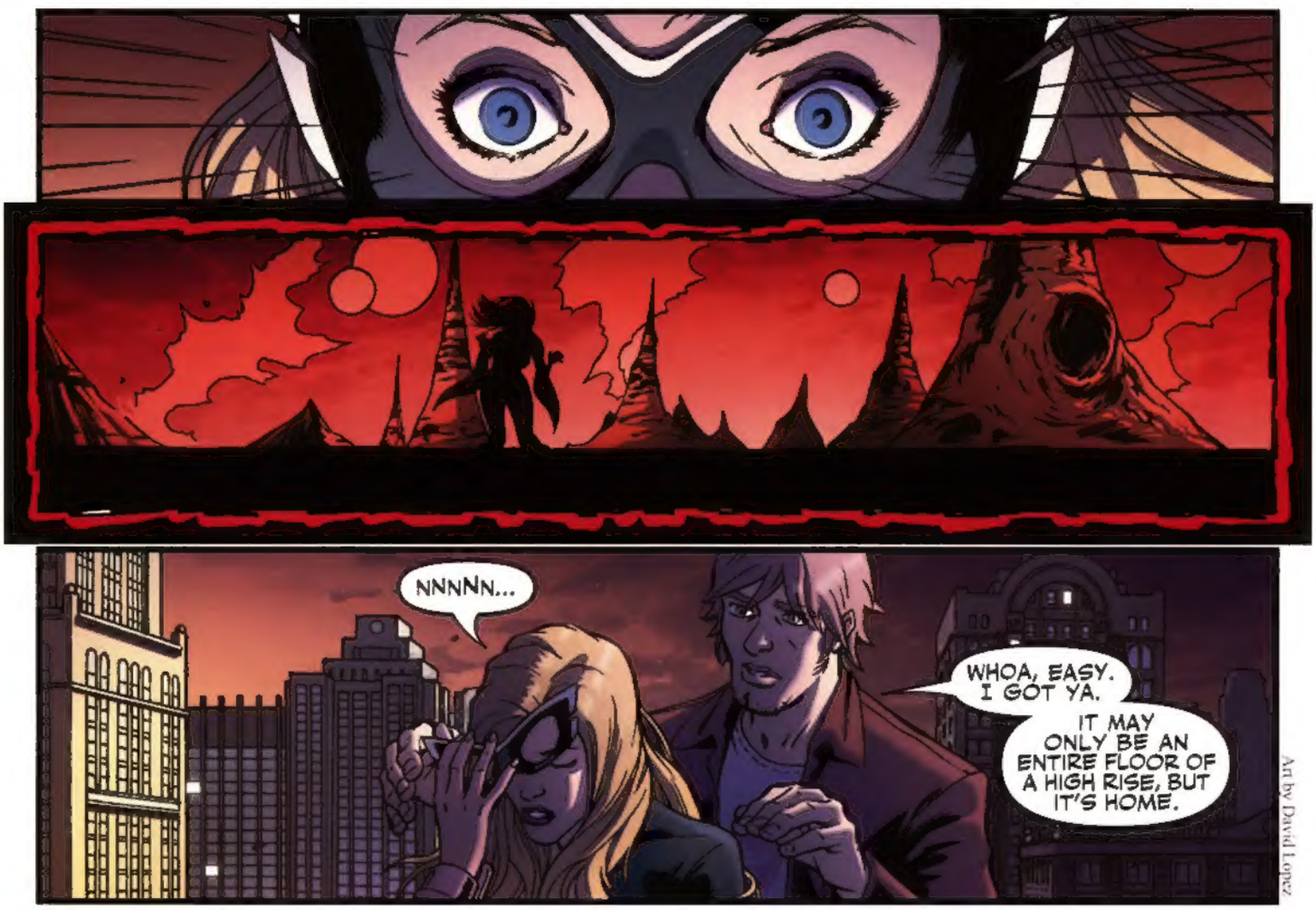
JIM: I hope fans really enjoy this and I hope this wins over some new readers. You and I both know Mockingbird and Clint are cool, but there are a bunch of people who have no idea why they're so cool, and I hope this goes a long way to sharing that with them.

I also owe a huge debt of gratitude to Brian for bringing Mockingbird back. He has a large enough cast in the Avengers ensemble to work with, but a lot of this would not be possible without him saying, "Okay! I get the *Mr. And Mrs. Smith* angle. Here, run with it!" With Bendis, all things are possible. Without him, none are…(*Laughter.*)

SPOTLIGHT: One last question: Besides writing, you're also Marvel's marketing guru. What are the logistical considerations for you to perform your duties in that capacity and then also find the time to clear your head and get the job done writing?

JIM: It takes a lot of juggling, but Marvel's been very good to me and very patient. I am still there working on the mainstream marketing, working with newspapers and magazines and the larger pushes, rather than the day-to-day marketing. I'm still doing conventions, so life should get very interesting around convention season, but I also have a couple of days a week to myself to be able to work on my writing projects. I'm learning how to balance all that. Ask me again in a year and I'll probably give a better answer!

Sooner than a year, we hope, so we can "reunite" and talk about other Marvel projects you have been working on. Until then, let's enjoy the drama and romance of Hawkeye and Mockingbird's return to prominence! ●



FRIGHTENING FLASHBACK: Mockingbird's horrific history in Skrull captivity will be explored in Jim McCann's upcoming series.

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT

WAR OF KINGS

NEXT ISSUE: WAR OF KINGS

Black Bolt Meets Vulcan In A Battle You'll Hear A Galaxy Away

DARK AVENGERS #1
Bendis • Deodato — January 2009

AVENGERS: THE INITIATIVE #21
Gage • Ramos — January 2009

DARK REIGN

MIGHTY AVENGERS #21
Slott • Pham — January 2009

NEW AVENGERS #49
Bendis • Tan — January 2009